



The stress-free way to
stay supple, keep fit
and exercise safely

SUZANNE MARTIN

stretching





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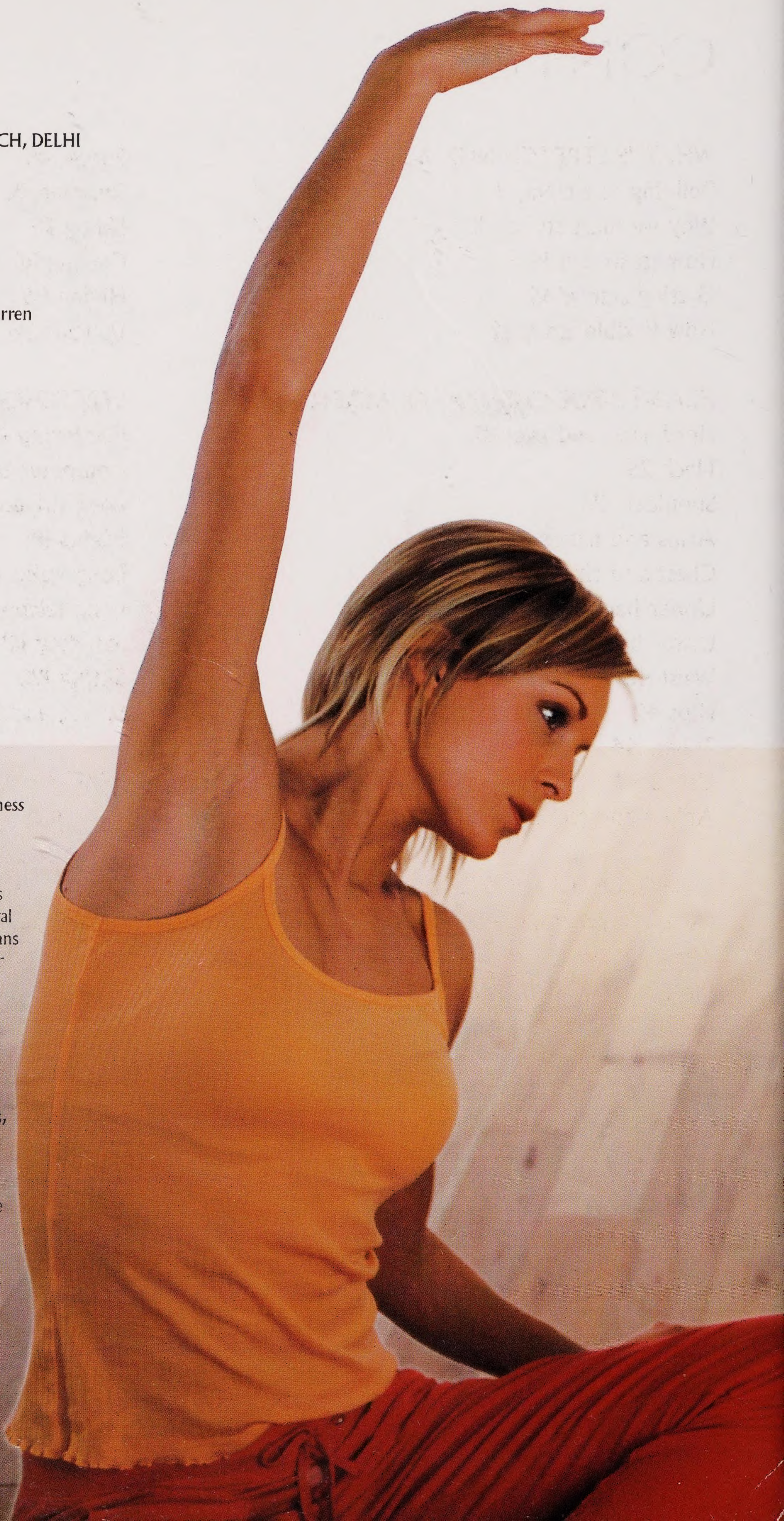
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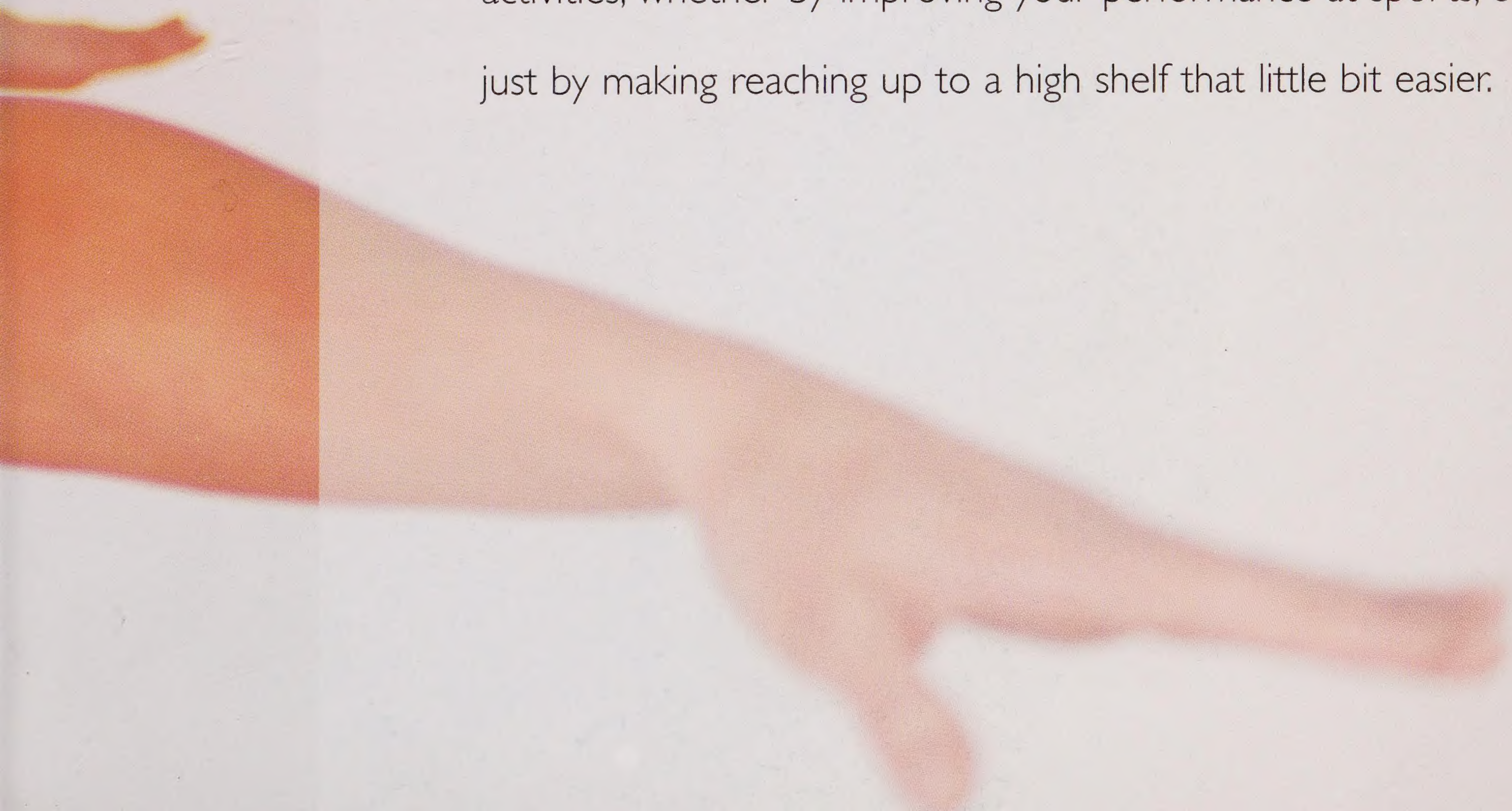
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WHAT IS STRETCHING?

Welcome to one of life's great pleasures. Stretching is for everyone, young and old, from all walks of life. You don't have to be a contortionist, professional athlete, or even in good shape to experience its joys and benefits. Stretching can help you to feel better and even to look better. This book will show you how to make it part of your lifestyle. You'll learn about the many ways that stretching can enhance your day-to-day activities, whether by improving your performance at sports, or just by making reaching up to a high shelf that little bit easier.



DEFINING STRETCHING

In this book I will show you how stretching can truly transform your life. It is a simple and instantly gratifying form of physical release that can energize you in the morning or relax you at night. It can enhance your enjoyment of sports or ease a stiff neck after a long telephone call. I believe that stretching is as crucial to the proper functioning of the body as oxygen.

An essential component of fitness

Along with cardiovascular exercise (which raises your heart rate) and resistance training (lifting weights), stretching is an essential component of a complete fitness regime, yet it is often the most neglected. People either perceive it as too easy and, as a result, unnecessary, or too difficult, believing that only the very flexible actually benefit from stretching.

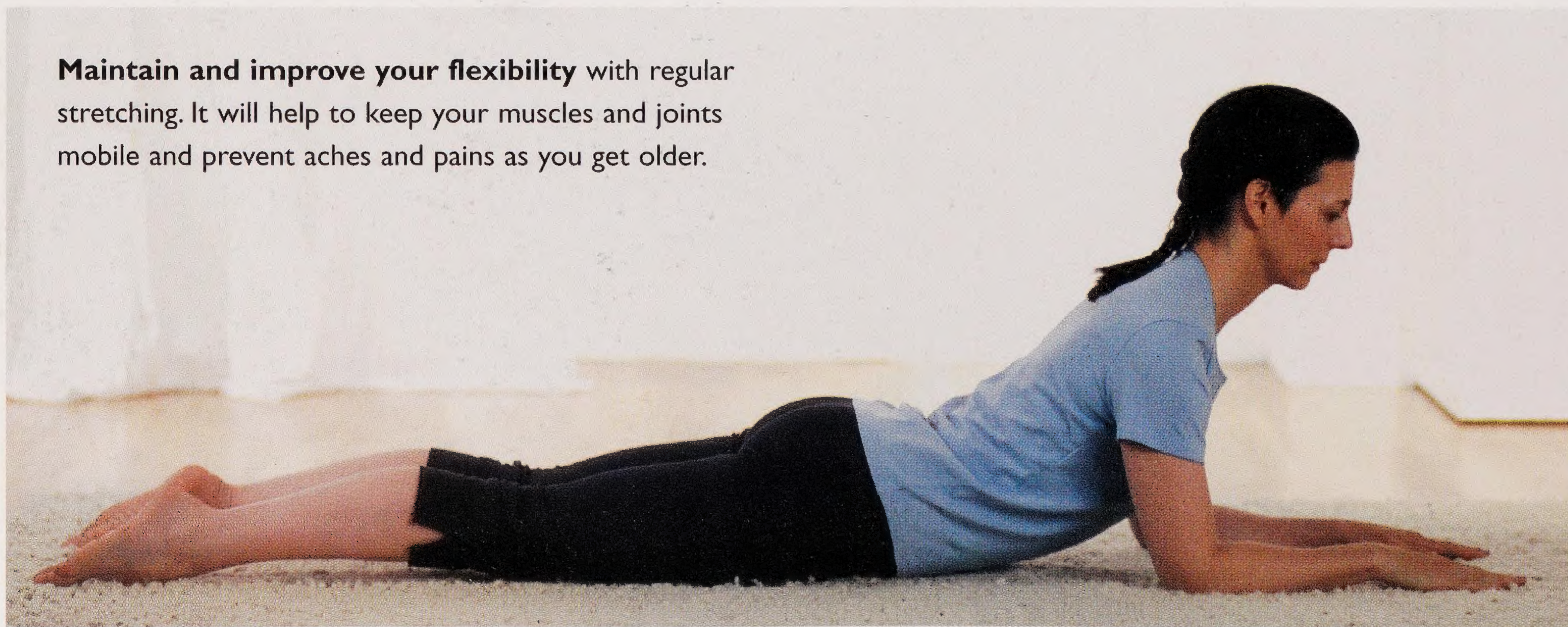
In fact, regular, controlled stretching improves and maintains flexibility and mobility, corrects bad posture, reduces the risk of injury, relieves pain, and even helps counteract the effects of ageing. In addition, it relaxes the body, helps reduce stress levels, and can help to boost self-esteem. Everyone, regardless of age or fitness level, can benefit from stretching. By making it an integral part of your lifestyle, you will reap its many benefits.

Is it like yoga?

Many people think of yoga or Pilates when they think of stretching. Yoga's original goal was to increase flexibility for the positions of meditation. Pilates is often called moving yoga, but the main goals are torso strength and control. Both yoga and Pilates follow a strict form and require expert instruction to avoid injury. Stretching is different, in that it is simple. It aims to align the body, improve posture, and encourage better mechanical movement of the joints, which reduces wear and tear on them. Put simply, stretching helps the body to work harmoniously.

Stretching affects more than the 602 muscles of the body. When you stretch muscles, you also mobilize joints, elongate skin, and affect connective tissue, nerves, tendons, and sometimes ligaments.

Maintain and improve your flexibility with regular stretching. It will help to keep your muscles and joints mobile and prevent aches and pains as you get older.



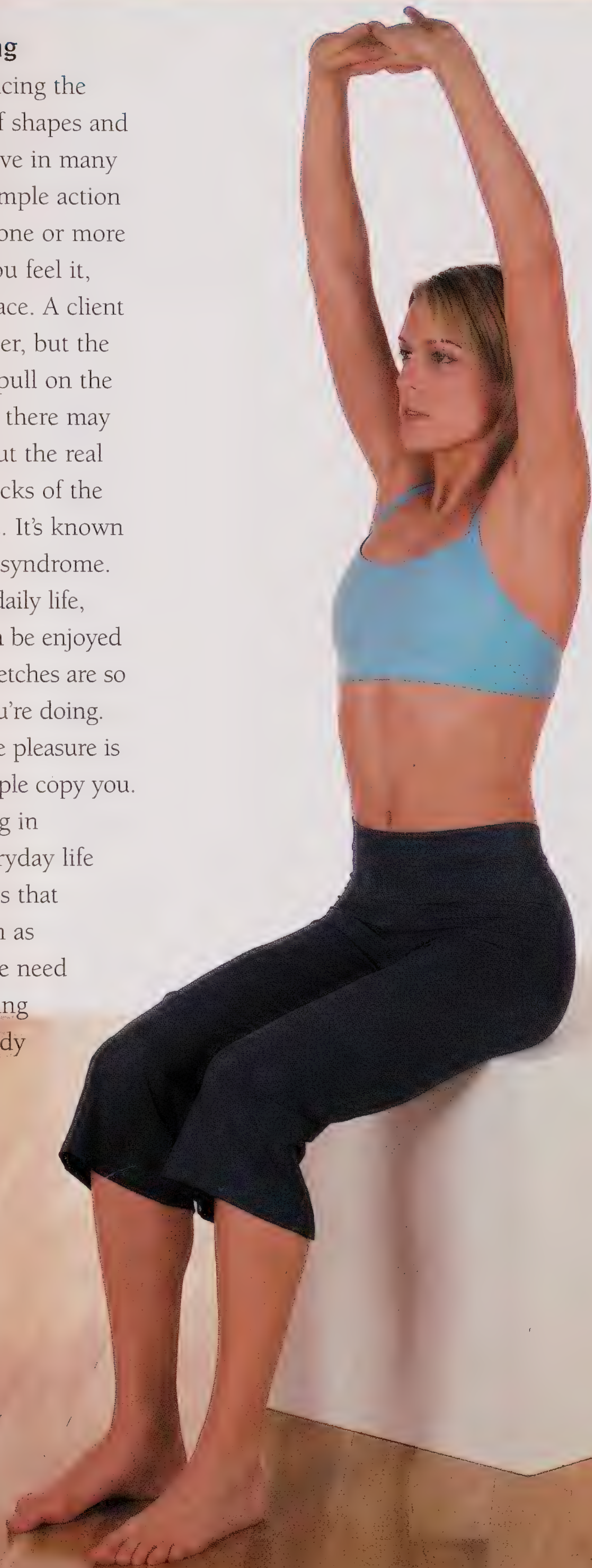
The rebalancing effect of stretching

Think of stretching as a way of rebalancing the body. Our muscles come in a variety of shapes and sizes. Arranged around joints, they move in many complex ways. Sometimes making a simple action can involve as many as 19 muscles. If one or more of these muscles is used improperly, you feel it, and not always in the most obvious place. A client may come to me with a painful shoulder, but the cause may be tight chest muscles that pull on the joint and put it under strain. Similarly, there may be a complaint of a sore lower back, but the real culprits may be tight muscles at the backs of the thighs and rigid muscles in the ribcage. It's known as the noisy victim and silent criminal syndrome.

Functional stretching, stretching for daily life, doesn't require special equipment. It can be enjoyed anywhere and at any time. Often the stretches are so subtle that people won't realize what you're doing. When you stretch more dramatically, the pleasure is obvious—you may even notice that people copy you.

Stretching is as essential as breathing in counteracting the wear and tear of everyday life and activity. And the wonderful thing is that beginners stand to benefit just as much as advanced movers—even flexible people need to balance their muscles. Make stretching your lifestyle, and you'll make your body a friend for life.

Take pleasure in stretching—enjoy the feeling of release that comes from lengthening and elongating your muscles.



WHY WE MUST STRETCH

Stretching improves flexibility and energizes the body, but it is also important for good posture. Over our lifetimes, the constant downward pull of gravity and the dehydrating effects of aging cause us gradually to hunch our shoulders and—more alarmingly—to shrink. Regular stretching can help you achieve an upright and energetic posture and a vital, healthy, and pain-free body.

Our bodies suffer daily fatigue from fighting against the constant downward pull of gravity. At the same time, aging has a dehydrating effect, and as we grow older, our bodily tissues become leathery. After years of being right- or left-handed and performing regular activities such as sitting and driving, we start to stiffen into the positions we have assumed through the years. The effect is to leave you sagging, hunched over, and too tired to carry on. However, this doesn't have to be a death sentence. You can counteract the effects of gravity and aging on the body and achieve your ideal posture with a stretching program that balances muscular irregularities.

Typical bad posture

Look at the figure on the right. Her stooped posture is typical of the effects of gravity and aging. She has an overall saggy appearance—as if she is literally being dragged down. A tight neck and face give the impression of being tired and strained—she really looks as if she carries the weight of the world on her shoulders. Her hunched shoulders are the result of tight chest muscles and practically guarantee arm and hand pain over time. The rotator cuff muscles of the shoulder are literally pinched by this forward position, which often causes pain and discomfort. A tight lower back not only leads to an unsightly protruding abdomen, it compresses the nerves and can lead to sciatica, leg pain, or, worse yet, problems with bathroom and sexual functions. Tight front of hip muscles intensify the forward sway of

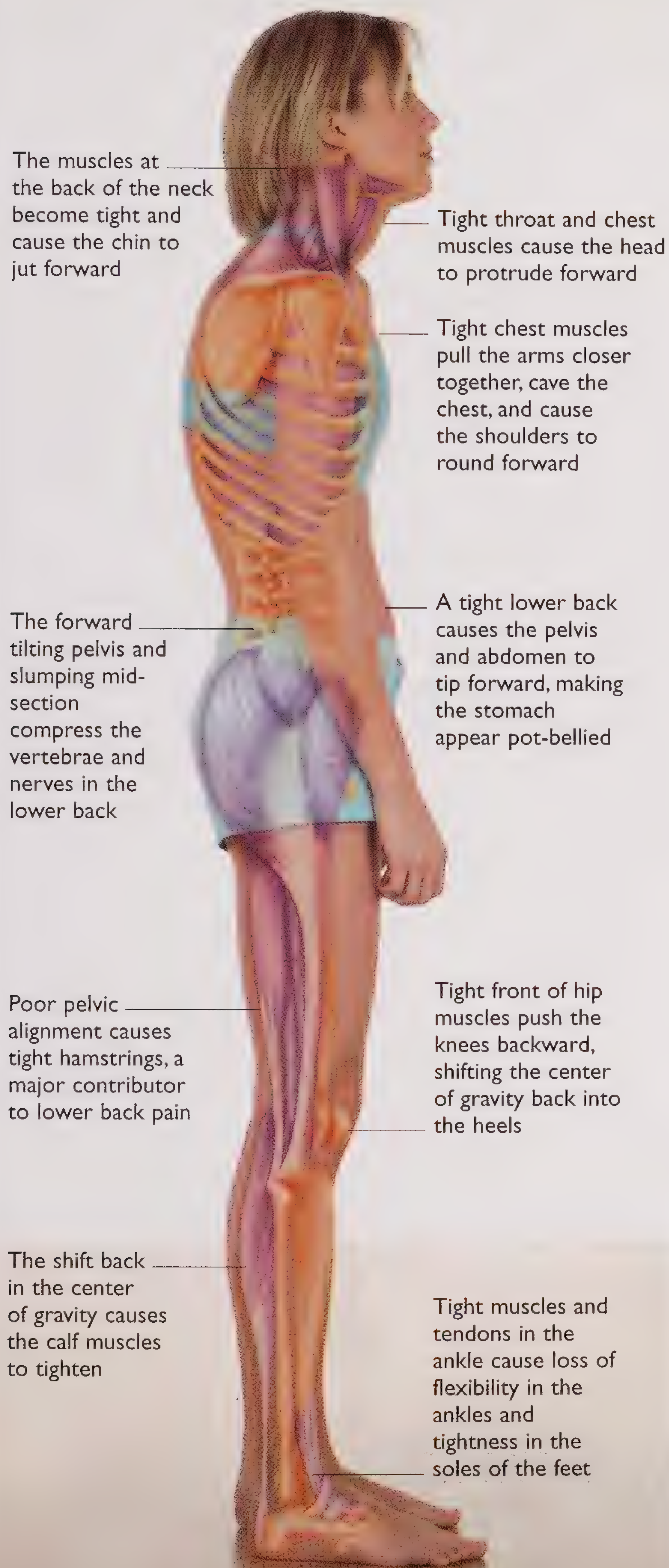
the lower back and often lead to knee problems, the scourge of females, since they are already prone to knee problems because of genetically wider hips. In pronounced cases, the forward sway of the lower back can give an unsightly appearance to the buns. Tight hamstrings inevitably cause lower back pain. The calves and feet are notoriously tight because we are on them all day. Tight calves can lead to a painful yet preventable injury, Achilles' tendon rupture. Tight feet tend to lead to plantar fasciitis, an uncomfortable heel condition.

Ideal body posture

Now look at the figure on the far right. Notice what a huge difference good posture makes to how you perceive this person: Bright, confident, and athletic. Her face is no longer strained because her head is back over the line of her pelvis. Her neck is now swan-like. Once the shoulders are back and the chest is open, the forlorn look is replaced by an open, relaxed one. Her ears now line up over her shoulders. The rotator cuff can move the arm in its socket the way it was intended. The waist is elongated because the lower back is lengthened. Sitting will now be easier. The abdomen is sleek and no longer protrudes. The hips are upright and forward, which will help her to stand for long periods without feeling tired. The pelvis is positioned more forward on the feet, enabling more bounce in the step and that “go to it” feeling that gives motivation to take on a new day.

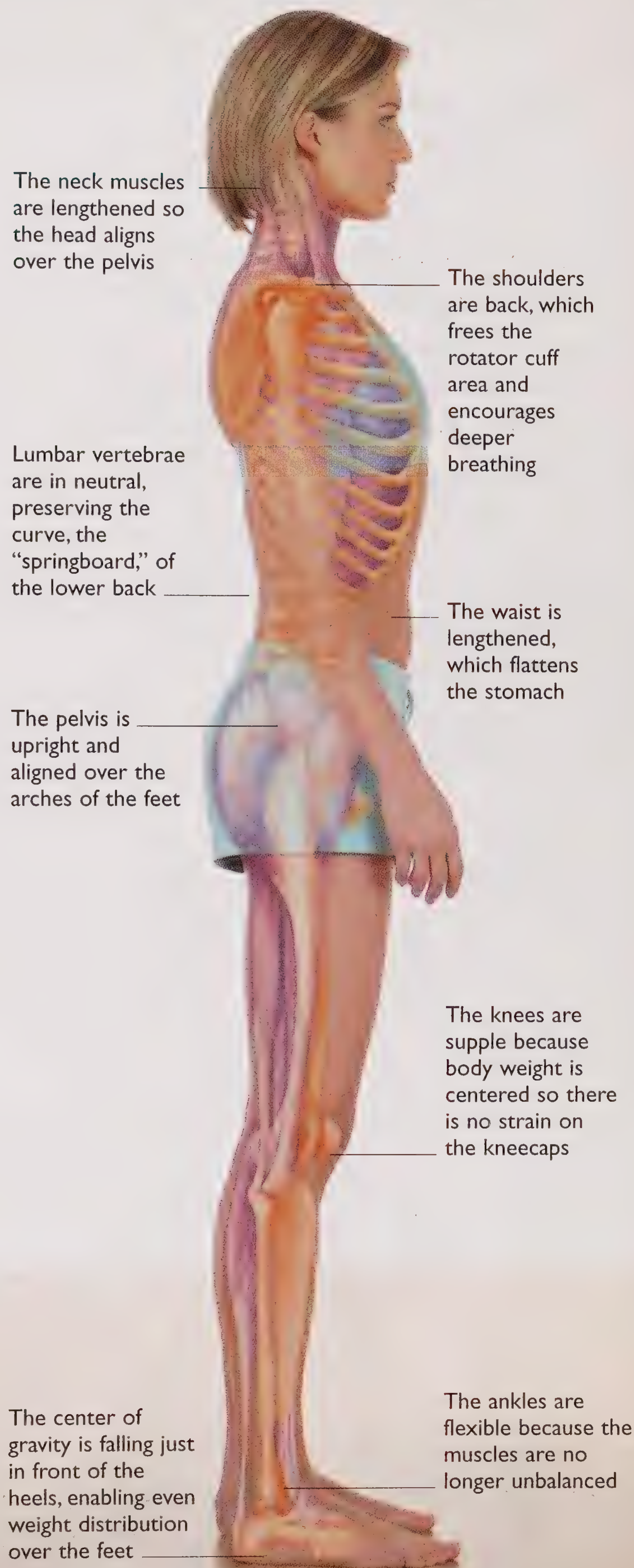
TYPICAL BAD POSTURE

Tight muscles pull the skeleton out of alignment, creating awkward and ungainly posture. Muscle aches and pains are common for this person.



IDEAL POSTURE

The head aligns over the pelvis, the shoulders are back, and the muscles are balanced, giving a sleek, streamlined appearance.



What happens when you stretch?

Strong muscles, tendons, bones, and ligaments are essential to maintain a healthy, vital body that will serve you well for your entire life. As soon as you go into a stretch you immediately begin to feel the pull of your muscles upon your bones. Tendons connect muscles to bones, and the pull of stretching can help the tendons to “plump up,” helping to prevent the injuries that occur all too often when exercising or just carrying out everyday activities.

Ligaments connect bone to bone and hold the skeleton together. The aim when stretching correctly is to elongate the muscles and tendons while protecting the ligaments—you don’t want them to stretch. Each muscle has an optimum length, and this book will show you which ones to stretch and where so that you achieve your ideal posture. Focused and correct stretching helps align the spine and balance the muscle groups that would otherwise become shortened by gravity over time.

As we age and our bodies slowly dehydrate, stretching is even more important. In the same way that this slow process of dehydration causes wrinkles on the exterior, it also affects the body tissues inside our skin. Not only do our muscles, tendons, and ligaments dry out and tighten, they become leathery. Over time this causes the body to stiffen, gradually giving a stooped appearance, but it also begins to block the healthy circulation of nutrients around the body.

A stretch may target a muscle, or group of muscles, but its benefits will be felt throughout the body, and even on a mental level.

THE BENEFITS OF STRETCHING

Listed below are just some of the many physical and mental benefits that stretching has to offer:

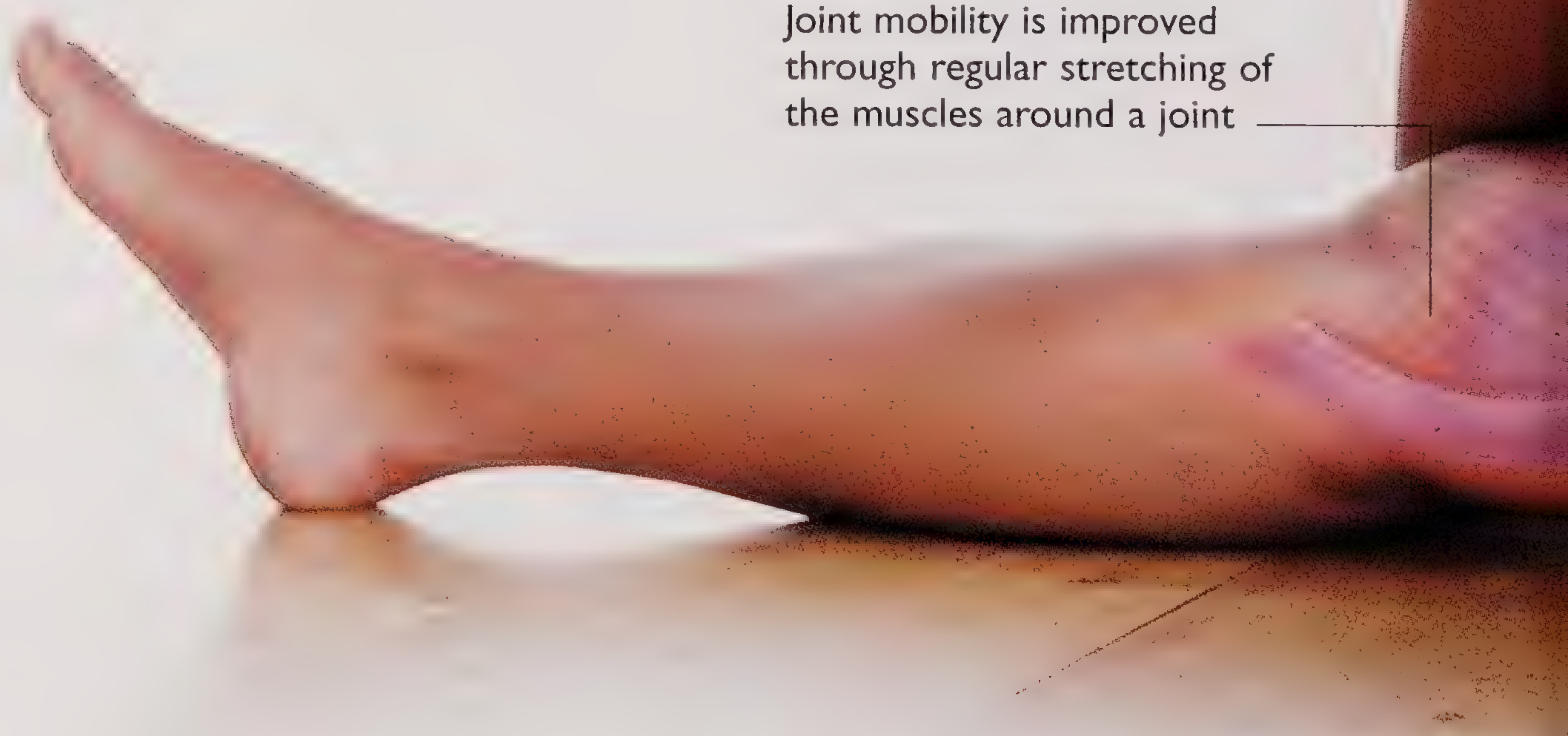
- helps balance muscle lengths, which aligns the body, improving and correcting posture
- improves flexibility and mobility so that sitting, walking, and standing become easier
- helps counteract the effects of aging by promoting circulation of nutrients and water throughout the body
- reduces risk of injury by improving flexibility and balance
- promotes relaxation and reduces stress
- energizes body, mind, and spirit.

Stretching affects not only our muscle system, but also our neurological system, which includes the operation of the brain. When you stretch, you lengthen some areas while relaxing others. The brain in turn regulates automatic functions such as heart rate and blood pressure. It secretes hormones, which act as chemical messengers to help insulin control, metabolism, mood, and emotion.

Besides the internal physiological benefits come the day-to-day benefits of being flexible enough to sit without experiencing back and shoulder pain. Simple actions such as bending down to small

Knee joint

Joint mobility is improved through regular stretching of the muscles around a joint



children or reaching up to a high shelf all become easier. Walking and stair climbing become more efficient so that you use less energy and, as a result, feel less fatigued during the day.

IT band tendon

Tendons such as the IT band flatten out when stretched, increasing flexibility and reducing the risk of imbalance and over-use injuries

Along with the physical benefits come untold emotional and mental ones. Stretching is the original mind-body activity. It slows you down so that your heart and mind can come together to achieve an inner calmness. Many a time a simple stretch can put a problem in perspective, and so a better solution can be found to life's many dilemmas.

Neck muscles

Stretching can improve posture; this position strengthens the muscles in the neck, which help keep the head aligned

Deltoid (shoulder) muscles

The muscles in the shoulders work hard—stretching them helps to counteract this work

Pectoral (chest) muscles

Stretching muscle replenishes it with water and oxygen

Ribcage and chest

Stretching the muscles of the ribcage and chest allows your lungs to breathe more deeply

Ligaments

There are deep ligaments within the spine—holding correct posture when stretching protects them

Back erector muscles

Twisting the muscles at the side of the spine helps balance muscles, which can help reduce wear and tear on the spine

Gluteal (buttock) muscle

Short muscles are weak; stretching the gluteals to their optimum length keeps them strong



HOW TO STRETCH

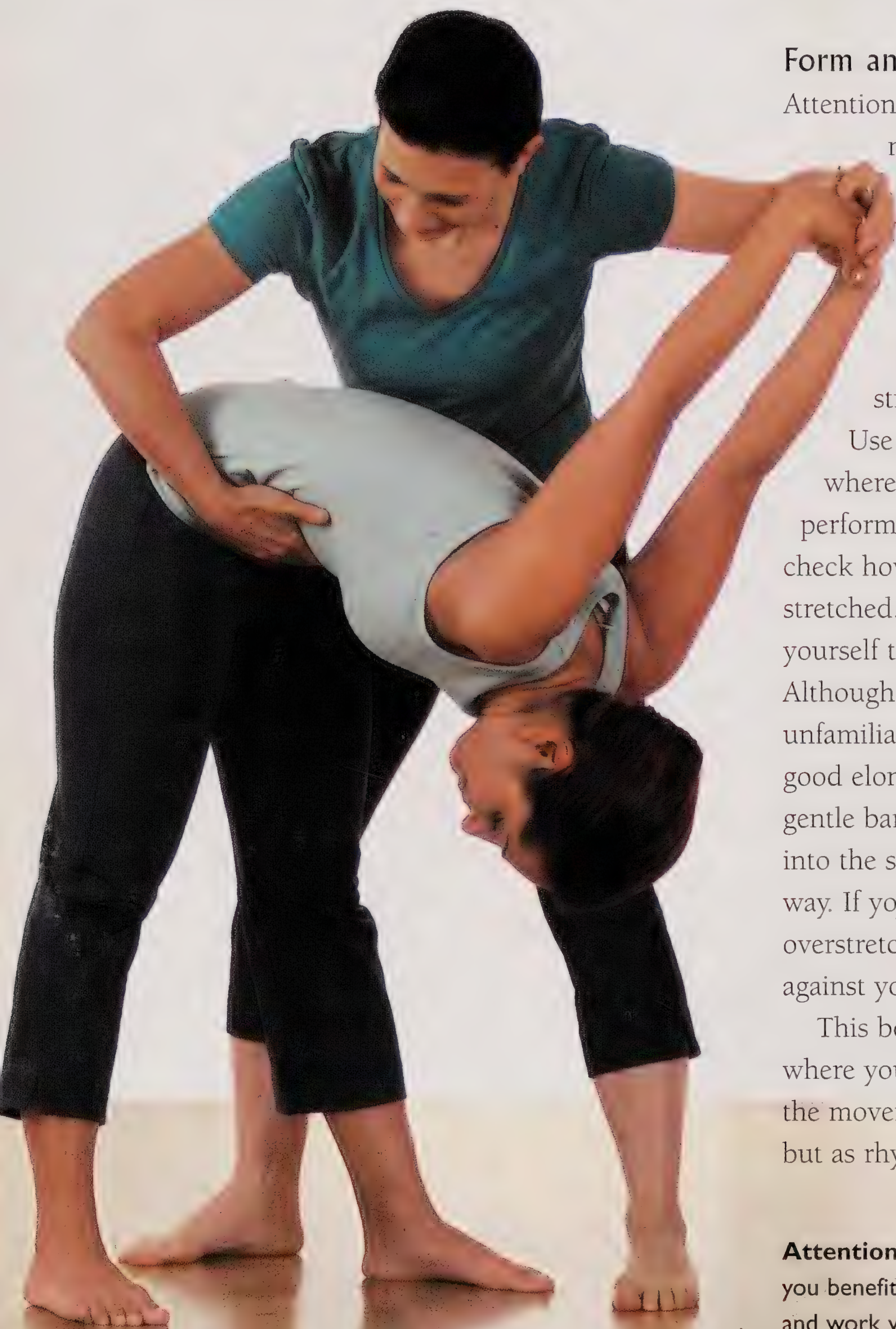
Stretching is exercise made simple. It is easy to perform, and requires minimum exertion to feel fantastic benefits. From the very beginning, the sensation of breathing into a stretch will make you feel better. You'll notice that little aches and pains disappear, and you'll be drawn in to want more. Here I outline some simple guidelines to ensure sensible, effective, and pleasurable stretching.

Form and focus

Attention to form helps ensure that you get the most out of a stretch. Most of the stretches in this book are elongation stretches, where you hold one part of the body and stretch the other against it. Do your best to get into the positions demonstrated. If you can't replicate a stretch exactly, get as close as you can to it. Use the "feel it here" patches as guides to where you feel a stretch when you are performing it correctly. Gently ease into a position, check how it feels, then focus on the muscles being stretched. Never bounce. Be careful not to push yourself too far—respect your body's limitations. Although the positions may feel awkward or unfamiliar at first, there should never be any pain. A good elongation stretch feels as if you are reaching a gentle barrier of tension, then as you slowly ease into the stretch, you should feel that barrier give way. If you hold an elongation stretch too tautly and overstretch, your muscle will actually pull back against you.

This book also features some moving stretches, where you follow a movement pattern. Generally, the movements should always be slow and smooth but as rhythmic as possible. An effective moving

Attention to good form and technique will ensure that you benefit fully from a stretch and don't risk injury. Focus, and work with your body, not against it.



stretch feels like a release.

Finally, respect your body type. Some people are more flexible in their ligaments by nature. If you can touch your thumb to your forearm, or if your elbows or knees are naturally hyperextended (they bend back slightly), you are more flexible than the general population. Lanky people tend to be flexible in the joints. If this sounds like you, take care. Try not to push yourself into extreme end-of-range positions. No matter what, if you feel apprehension about a position, your intuition is trying to tell you something. Come out of the stretch and figure out how to make the position smaller and more precise.

Breathing

Be sure to breathe deeply and rhythmically throughout a stretch. People tend to hold their breath or forget to breathe when concentrating on or counting out a stretch. Instead of counting, I recommend that you hold a stretch for a number

of breath cycles. (A breath cycle is a deep breath in and then out.) Breathing deeply helps you to relax and will actually help you to ease further into a stretch without straining. Even during a moving stretch, it's important to remember to breathe.

Stabilizing

One key element in elongation stretching is the need for a stabilizing anchor—something stable that you can stretch away from in order to lengthen a particular body part. In standing positions, gently squeezing the buns “anchors” the pelvis and prevents it from twisting or tilting. Lifting the groin or pelvic floor adds to the effect. (Similar to Kegel exercises, this should feel as if an elevator is going up the inside of the body from the bottom of the pelvis.) Pulling your navel into the spine refers to abdominal and back control. Contracting your back and abdominal muscles stabilizes the spine and ensures that you protect it and prevent any ligament

Some are more flexible than others. Although I can reach further than the person on the right, we both benefit equally from this stretch.



GETTING STARTED

Stretching is for people of all ages and abilities. If you are new to it, start gradually—devote just a few minutes a day to it and you'll soon feel the benefits. Don't compare yourself to others; use stretching to get to know your own body better. Follow these simple suggestions to help you get started—and to enjoy stretching for the rest of your life!

How to use this book

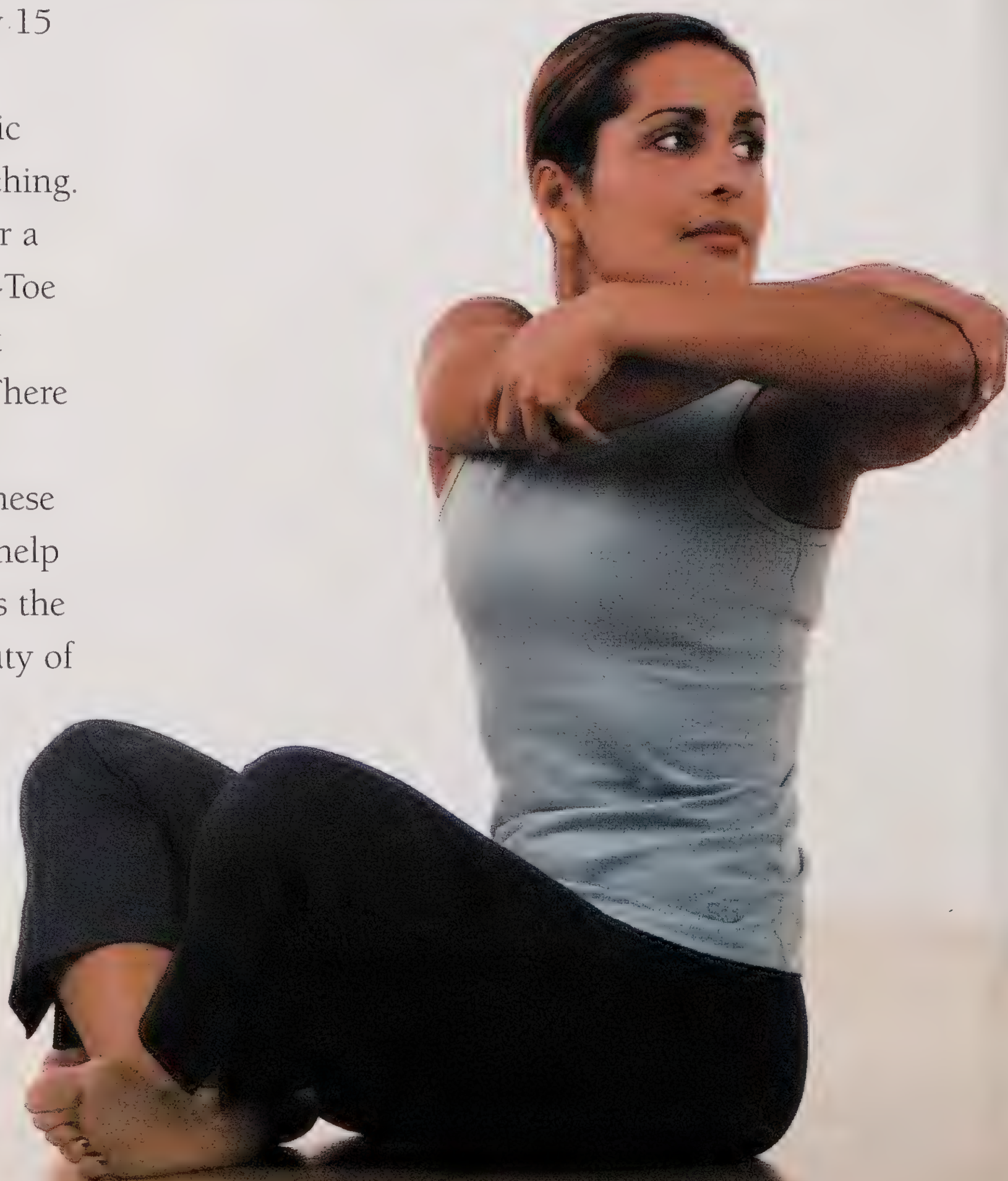
Getting started is easy. I recommend that everyone begin with the simple Flexibility Test (*see pp.18–19*). This helps you to identify how flexible you are naturally, but it also helps you to pinpoint tight areas that may need more attention.

If you're a beginner, a good place to start is the 21-day Posture Program (*see pp.52–65*). The main goal is to make stretching a lifestyle and a part of your daily routine. The program requires only 15 minutes a day for three weeks and yet it can produce truly remarkable results. It's a fantastic advertisement for the benefits of regular stretching.

Alternatively, whether you are a beginner or a more practiced stretcher, consult the Head-to-Toe Catalog of Stretches (*see pp.20–51*) to target particular areas of the body that need work. There are numerous stretches for different sports, activities, and times of life contained within these pages. There are also therapeutic stretches to help you to deal with typical problem areas such as the neck and shoulders and lower back. The beauty of this book is that you have many stretches from which to pick and choose, creating hundreds of new variations of sequences.

When to stretch

Ideally, you should aim to stretch daily, whether you're a beginner or a regular stretcher. You don't have to wait between days as with weight training. If you plan to stretch every day, choose a convenient time and make it part of your routine. Find the time or times that work best in your schedule, whether early in the morning or last thing at night. Try to integrate stretching into your day whenever



Notice how you feel when you stretch.

How does your body respond? Can you twist as far to the right as you can to the left?

possible. During long periods at the computer, get into the habit of taking regular stretching breaks; take five minutes to perform a short routine after a flight or a long drive.

One common misconception is that you should stretch to warm up before sports. A pre-sport warm-up should consist mainly of swinging, rhythmic movements that help to limber you up. The idea is to increase circulation and body heat, not lengthen the muscles. Over-stretching before sports can actually decrease strength and reaction times.

What to wear

You don't need special clothing for stretching, especially if you are gardening, on the road, or doing a sport. Wear anything comfortable that won't make you feel too hot or cold. Any athletic wear or loose sweats will do, so will leggings and a tee shirt. Wear whatever suits your lifestyle, as long as the clothes don't restrict your movements.

Medical considerations

Respect your body's limitations: Stretch judiciously. If you have specific body problems, such as lower back and neck complaints or old shoulder injuries, consult your healthcare provider and confirm that these stretches are safe for you to perform.

A word about pregnancy

Gentle stretching is generally safe and beneficial during pregnancy and after the birth. To be absolutely certain of safety, check with your healthcare provider before you begin stretching, especially if you are new to it. The body produces a hormone called relaxin during pregnancy and up to about three months after childbirth (and the same applies for miscarriages). Relaxin relaxes the muscles and tendons in preparation for childbirth, but it may also put you at risk of stretching beyond your normal range. Do take care—don't push yourself. Use any suggested props to ensure your comfort (*see Props below*).

PROPS

For some stretches, I might suggest that you use a prop, either to make a position more comfortable (which will help you to relax and stretch more effectively), or to help you to maintain

good form. In some cases, a prop such as a tennis ball can help you to target specific tight muscles. These props are all items that can be found around the home.



For seated floor stretches, try sitting on a phone book to help straighten your back and relieve pressure on the sides of the feet.



For kneeling stretches, try placing a folded towel under the knees to cushion them and help make the position more comfortable.



For pregnancy stretches that involve lying on your side, place a pillow or cushion under your waist for support.



In some cases, applying pressure with a tennis ball can help to focus a stretch—for example, in the calves, back, or soles of feet.

HOW FLEXIBLE AM I?

Flexibility differs from one person to the next. Even the most pliable people have areas of the body that need work—they tend to stretch only the areas and in the directions in which they are most flexible. Use this series of tests to help isolate less flexible areas of the body, those that will really benefit noticeably from regular stretching.

Although the tests are demonstrated on one side of the body, be sure to test your flexibility on both sides. Each test provides a guide to measure your degree of flexibility. Notice how you feel in the positions, and compare your side-to-side results. Is your right leg tighter than your left? Is any body part talking to you? Then use the Head-to-Toe Catalog of Stretches (see pp.20–51) to help you target specific areas, or refer to Stretches by Body Part (see pp.156–158). Alternatively, follow the 21-day Posture Program (see pp.52–65) and compare your test results before and after.

NECK FLEXIBILITY



Stand with your arms by your sides, shoulders back and down, and neck relaxed. Turn your head toward your right shoulder, as far as is comfortable. Keep your gaze level; don't turn with your chin.

Less than 60° poor; 60–75° good; 75–90° very flexible

CHEST FLEXIBILITY



Stand with your back to a wall and take a step forward. Position feet slightly more than hip-width apart, and lean your shoulders and head back against the wall. Bend your arms at 90° angles against the wall, elbows at shoulder height, palms facing outward. Your forearms, upper back, and head should all touch the wall.

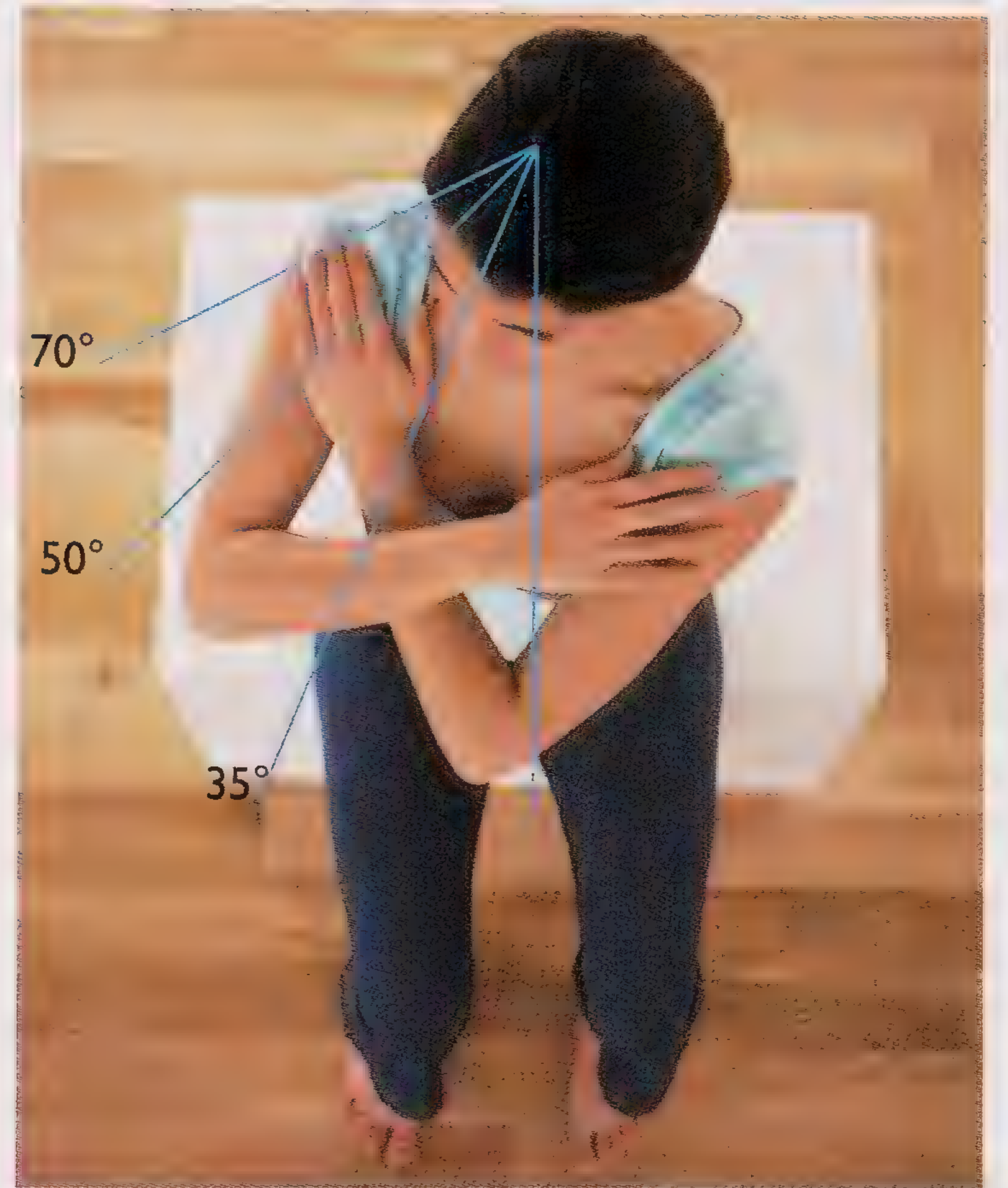
ARM AND SHOULDER FLEXIBILITY

Stand with back straight and shoulders back and down. Raise one arm straight up by the side of your head with palm facing inward. Keep your hips tucked under and your abdominals tight.

Less than 160° poor; 160–180° good; 180–190° very flexible



TORSO FLEXIBILITY



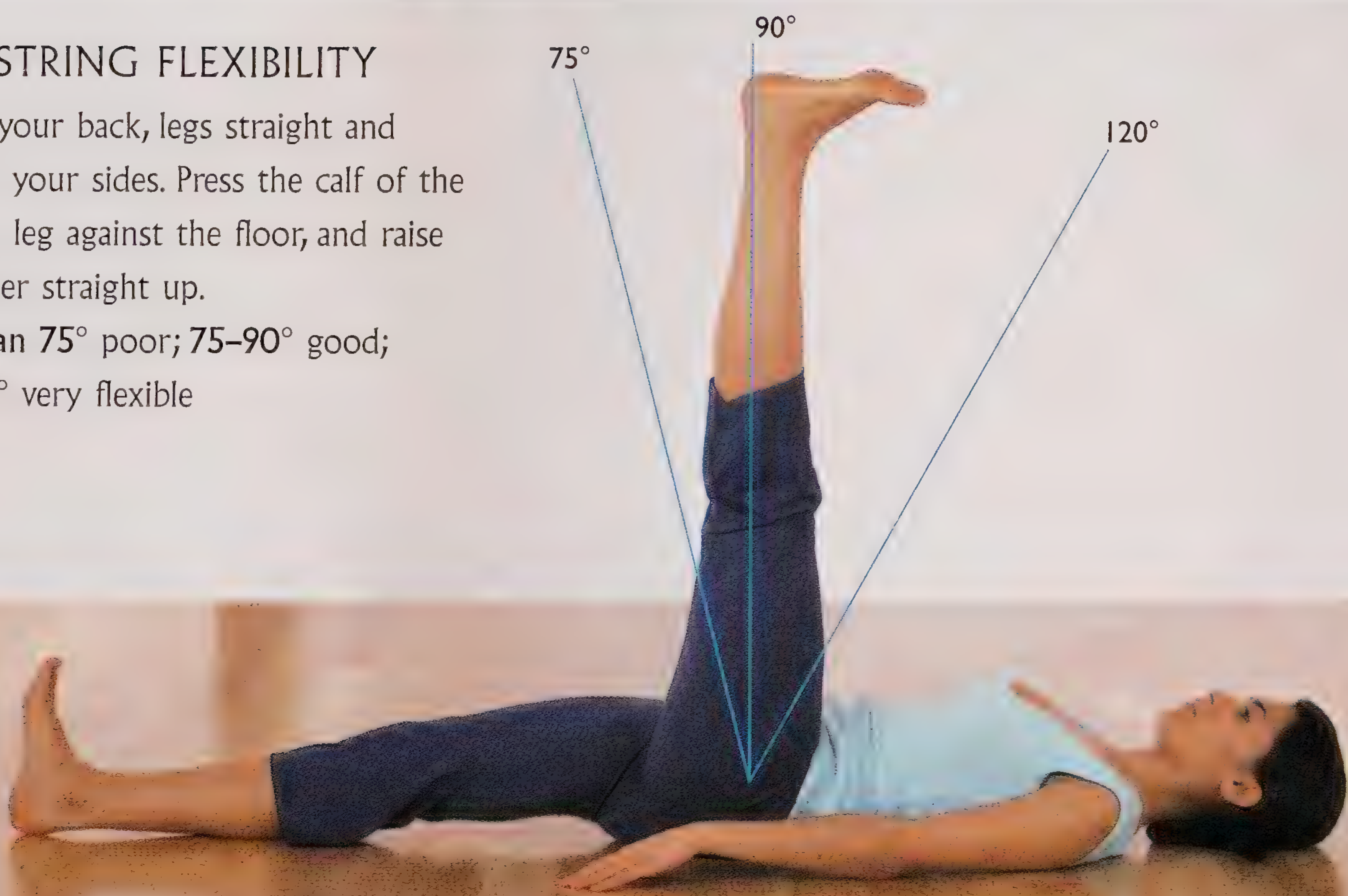
Sit forward on a chair, back straight, and feet flat on the floor. Place your hands on opposite shoulders, and raise your elbows to chest height. Keeping your head in line with your crossed arms, turn it to the right as far as is comfortable, without moving your legs.

Less than 35° poor; 35–50° good; 50–70° very flexible

HAMSTRING FLEXIBILITY

Lie on your back, legs straight and arms at your sides. Press the calf of the bottom leg against the floor, and raise the other straight up.

Less than 75° poor; 75–90° good; 90–120° very flexible





HEAD-TO-TOE CATALOG OF STRETCHES

There are stretches to target nearly every part of the body, from the muscles in your scalp and face that hold much of your daily tension, to the muscles and tendons in your feet that feel stiff after a long day of standing. In the pages that follow, you'll find what I consider to be key stretches, all organized by body part. Choose a stretch to suit your needs, or refer back to these stretches from the routines that appear later in the book. There are stretches for all levels of flexibility here; where possible, I've shown how to adapt positions in order to intensify a stretch.

HEAD, FACE, AND EYES

A common area of muscle stress and tension, the head and face respond favorably to attention. The scalp connects to facial and jaw muscles. The tongue, one of the most active muscles of the body, contributes to much jaw and neck discomfort, while the eyes endure constant strain. Go easy when performing these stretches, and be sure to keep your head aligned over your spine.

HAIR PULL

Starting at your temples, slide your open fingers back along your scalp. Grasp a handful of hair on either side of your head and pull until you feel gentle tension on your scalp. Hold for 2 breath cycles, then release and repeat, moving around your head.

pull hair gently
but firmly



LION STRETCH

This is a great stretch for the tongue, as well as the many other muscles of the face. Perform it as an end-

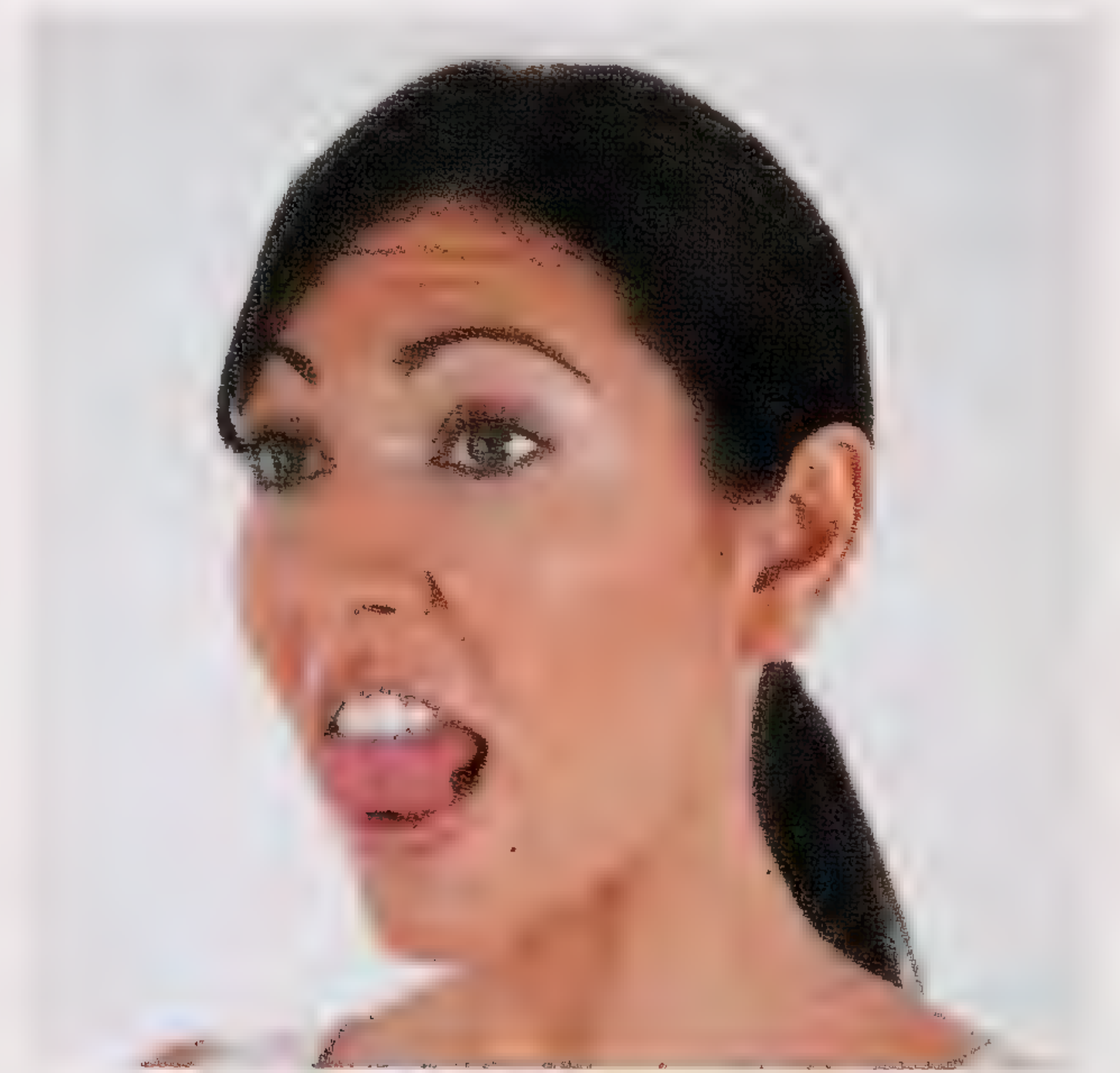
of-day tension-reliever. Tight face and throat muscles contribute to overall tension in the rest of the body.



1 Raise both eyebrows as if very surprised. Lift your head, look forward, and imagine that your ears are being pulled upward.



2 Keep your eyebrows raised. Now open your mouth slightly and lift your top lip to expose your upper teeth.



3 Press your tongue against your lower teeth so that it pushes your jaw down. Say “ahhh” for 5 counts, then relax.

EYE STRETCHES

Be sure to keep your head still so that you isolate each of the six muscles that control the precise movements

of your eyes. Perform these stretches every half hour if staring at a computer screen for long periods.



1 Focus your eyes down to the left. Follow an imaginary diagonal line up to the right, then back down to the left. Repeat 5 times. Then repeat starting at the bottom right, following the diagonal up to the left, then back down to the right.



2 Focus your eyes down to the left, then trace an imaginary horseshoe-shape up and over to the right. Then reverse the movement, starting down to the right and following the horseshoe up and over to the left. Repeat 3 more times.



3 Hold your index finger about 1 ft (30 cm) away from your nose. Stare at your fingertip for 2 breath cycles, then change your focus and look into the distance beyond your finger for 2 breath cycles. Repeat 2 more times.

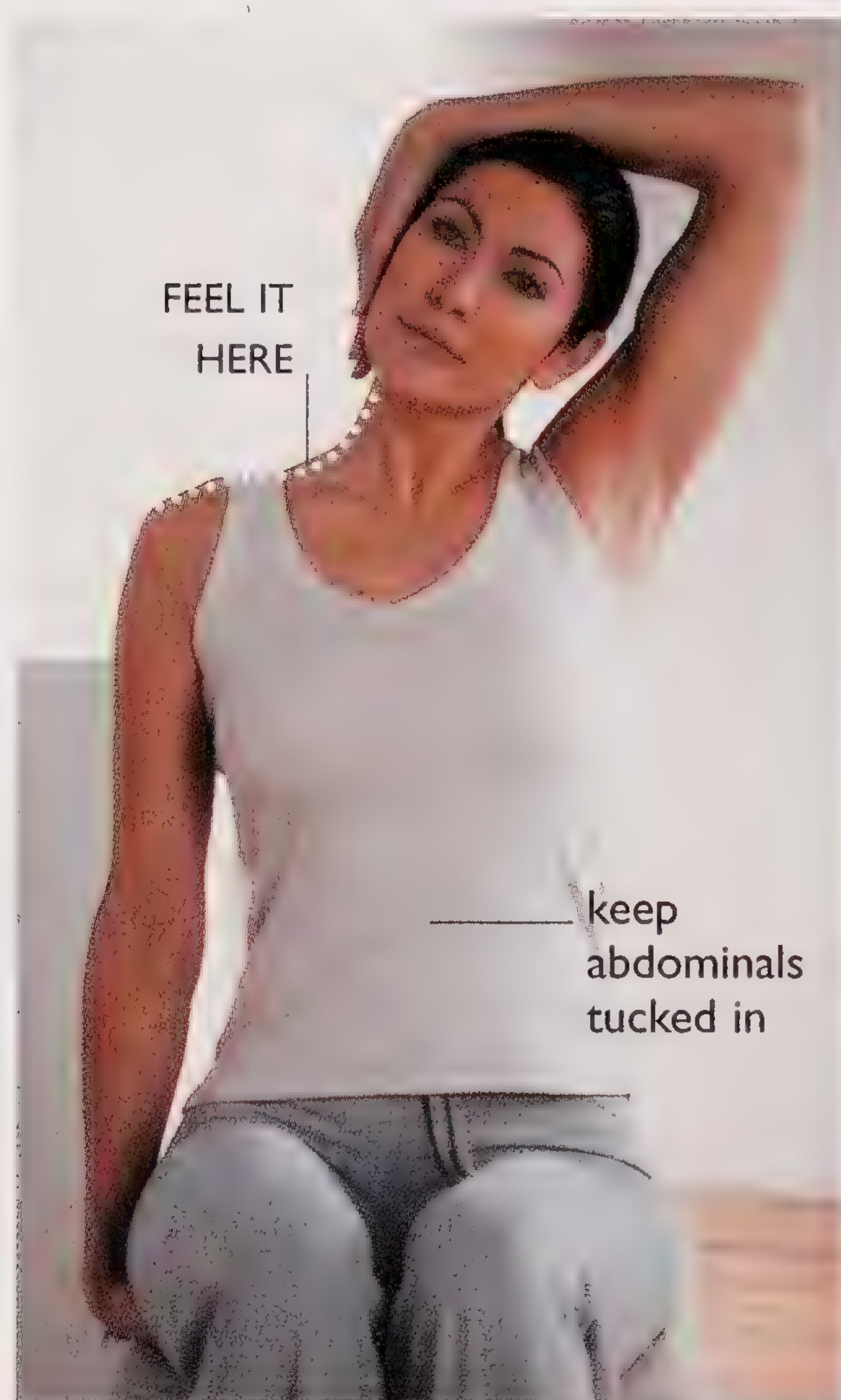
NECK

The neck balances the melon-like head on the rest of the body, causing the neck muscles to work like guy-wires to support this unwieldy weight. It performs most of the twisting action of the spine and enables you to turn your head and look over your shoulder. Approach this area of the body with delicacy and precision; go slowly and be sure never to pull down strongly on the head.

NECK STRETCH

After performing this sequence of neck stretches, use your hand to return your head gently to the upright position. Then soothe your neck muscles by

performing what is known as a “reliever”: Briskly rub your hands together to generate some heat, then cup them around your neck for 5–10 seconds.



1 Sit slightly forward on a chair, your feet flat on the floor. Position your right hand, palm up, under your right buttock. Drape your left arm up and over your head so that it gently tilts your head to the left. Feel a gentle stretch from your right ear to your right shoulder tip. Hold for 2 breath cycles.



2 Very slowly turn your head so that your chin faces diagonally downward. Feel the stretch behind your right ear and down the side of your neck. Hold for 2 breath cycles, then slowly come back to center.

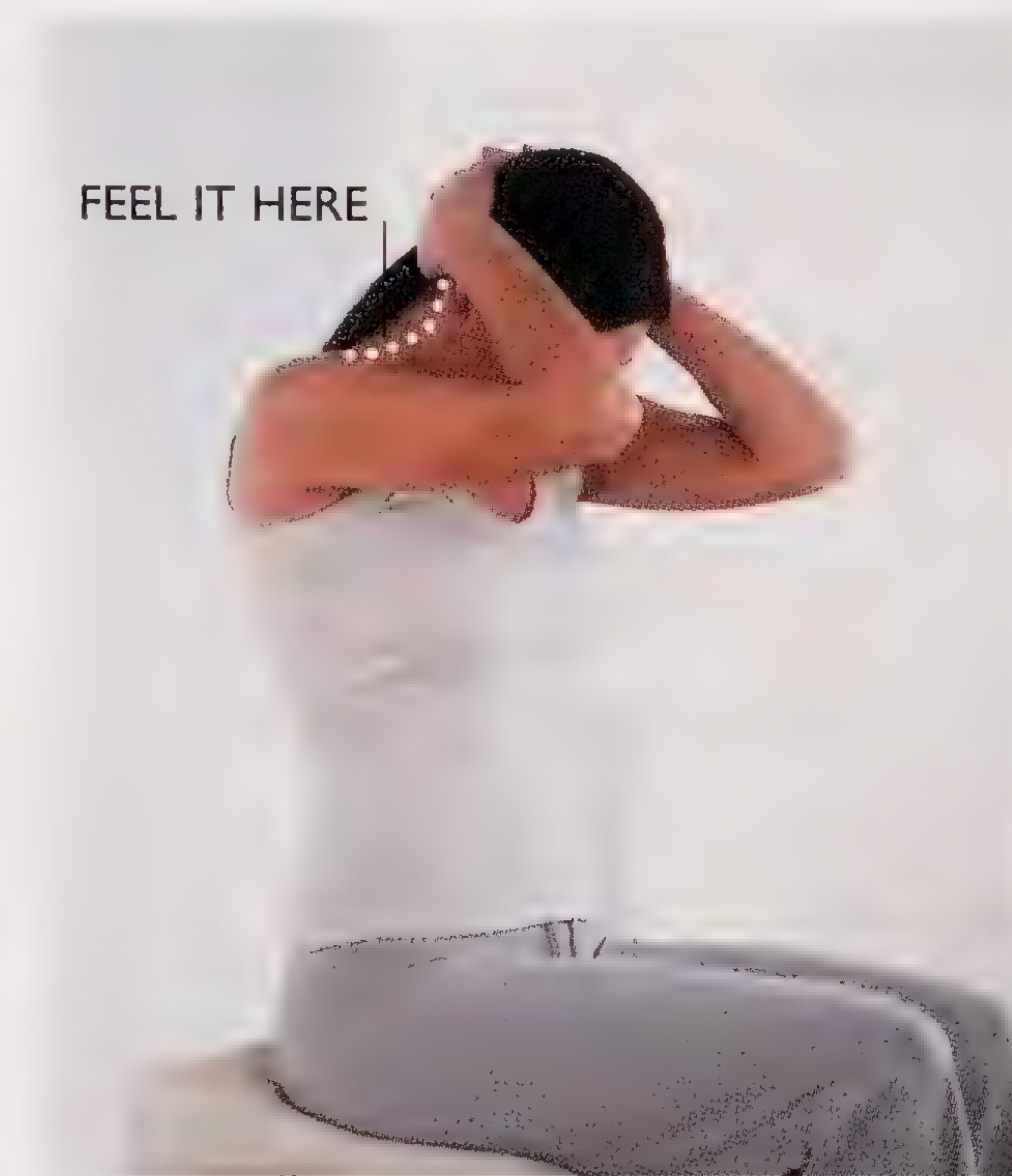


3 Slowly turn your head so that your chin faces diagonally upward. It should feel as if your eyes are being pulled upward. Hold for 2 breath cycles, then return to the center. Use your left hand to guide your head gently back to an upright position. Repeat steps 1–3 on the other side.

ROLL-DOWN STRETCH

The key to performing this stretch correctly is to keep your head back and your chin tucked under as you

roll your head down. This ensures that you stretch the entire neck, not just the lower part of it.



1 Sit slightly forward on a chair, your feet flat on the floor. Clasp your hands behind your head and hold it as if grasping a cantaloupe with the heels of your hands. Press your head back into your hands.

2 Gently lift your gaze and look diagonally upward. Feel as if a hook is lifting your breastbone toward the ceiling. Pull your elbows up and out as you stretch up, lifting your chest.

3 Keep the lift, and tuck your chin into your neck. Roll your head downward to look at your chest, as if rotating your head around an axis that passes through your ears. Hold for 2 breath cycles, then roll back up.

SEATED HEAD TURN

Sit slightly forward on a chair, your feet flat on the floor and your back straight. Turn your chin to your right shoulder. Hold onto the chair, and use your right hand to leverage more twist by pushing your right shoulder backward. Hold for 2 breath cycles, then release and repeat on the other side.



SHOULDERS

The shoulders carry the weight of the arms and are one of the main areas of the body prone to tension. The head, neck, and shoulders all function together as a unit, so loosening up the shoulders will free up the neck, and vice versa. The stretches here will help to preserve and improve range of movement in the shoulders as well as counteract the natural tendency to hunch forward.

SHOULDERS FRONT

This stretch helps to correct forward, slightly hunched shoulders. Perform it slowly, checking your balance and focusing the stretch by pulling your navel into your spine and holding your buns firm.



1 Stand with your hands clasped behind your back. Reach your hands away from your body and lift them slightly upward. Be sure not to allow your upper body to tip forward.



FEEL IT HERE

tuck in chin

keep buns tucked in

2 Hold your buns and abdominals firm, bow your head, and lean forward while lifting your hands up toward the ceiling. Hold for 4 breath cycles, then return to the upright stance.

SHOULDERS SIDE

This stretches the muscles around the shoulder blade and in the armpit. Tightness in these areas can cause stiffness as well as restrict shoulder movements.

1 Stand with your arms extended above your head, and grasp your left wrist with your right hand. Pull the wrist upward, elongating the left side of your body until you feel a gentle tension.

2 Maintaining the stretch, pull your left wrist up and over toward the right side. Anchor your left foot into the floor to focus the stretch. Hold for 4 breath cycles, then repeat, this time pulling your right wrist.



SHOULDERS BACK

Most people experience some muscle tightness in the backs of the shoulders. To feel the full benefit of this

stretch, remember to press your neck back slightly as you tuck your chin into your chest.



1 Stand with your arms extended in front of you, and clasp your hands at chest height. Be sure to keep your shoulders down.



2 Turn your palms to face away from you, and pull your shoulders back. Tuck your chin into your chest, pressing your neck back slightly to focus the stretch. Hold for 4 breath cycles.

ARMS AND HANDS

The arms and hands perform our most mundane tasks as well as our most intricate ones. Long tendons run along the fronts and backs of the forearms to the fingers. The palms contain muscles and tendons that enable the hands to grip and the fingers to be nimble. Stretching these areas helps to relieve strain and inflammation caused by repetitive actions such as typing and knitting.

ARM STRETCH

Extend your arms in front of you at chest height and clasp your hands so that your knuckles cross. Stretch your arms by pressing the heels of your hands away from you. Focus the stretch along your arms by imagining someone pulling your shoulders back as you reach your hands forward. Hold for 3 breath cycles.



CLASPED FINGERS

Extend your arms in front of you at chest height. Cross your fingers at the knuckles, and turn your palms away from you. Then press your fingertips against the backs of your hands and feel the stretch in your fingers and into the palms. Hold for 3 breath cycles.



ARMS OPEN

Stand with feet shoulder-width apart. Exhale and reach both arms upward while pulling your shoulder blades and ribcage down. Turn your palms upward, pressing them toward the ceiling, while reaching your fingertips down toward the floor. Feel a good stretch up through your arms but also between your ribcage and hips. Hold for 3 breath cycles.



CHEST AND RIBCAGE

We perform most of our arm movements in front of the body, which can cause the muscles of the chest to tighten, since we naturally round our shoulders forward. People who do no aerobic exercise, shallow breathers, older people, and those with asthma or breathing limitations also tend to have tight chests and ribcages. Muscle tightness in this area can also lead to arm and hand discomfort.

CORNER CHEST STRETCH

Stand facing a corner, hands raised at your sides, elbows bent, and hands up. Place your palms on the walls at shoulder height and lean your body weight into the corner. Pull your navel into your spine, and let your tailbone drop to focus the stretch across your chest. Hold for 4 breath cycles. This stretch can also be performed standing in a doorway.



INTENSIFY THE STRETCH

Position your hands further up the walls, and reach your elbows out sideways as you lean into the corner. Feel the stretch across your shoulders and upper arms.

SINGLE ARM STRETCH

This stretches the chest muscles and the major nerves in the arms that control the precise movements of your hands. Go easy; this should not be painful.



1 Stand facing a wall or doorway three quarters on. Place your palm on the wall mid-way between shoulder and waist height. Keep your elbow slightly bent to help focus the stretch on the chest and arm.



2 Press your hand into the wall and, feeling the stretch across your chest and in your upper arm, slowly turn away from your hand. Hold for 4 breath cycles. Repeat on the other side.

STANDING SIDE STRETCH

This stretches the sides of the ribcage while also opening up the muscles in the armpits, which have a tendency to become very tight.



1 Stand with feet hip-width apart. Pull your navel into your spine, drop your tailbone, and bend your knees slightly. Raise your right arm, and stretch up as if your middle finger is being pulled toward the sky.

2 Lean to the left, pulling the left arm downward at your side, as if your middle finger is being pulled toward the floor. Feel the stretch in the right side of your ribcage. Hold for 4 breath cycles, then repeat on the other side.



UPPER BACK

The muscles in the upper back are in constant use, since they help to stabilize the body when we move our arms; they must also maneuver the weight of the head. Ideally, aim to stretch this area of the body several times a day as this helps to loosen up the head, neck, and arms to work together in smooth coordination. Pay attention to form in order to isolate the upper back and protect the spine.

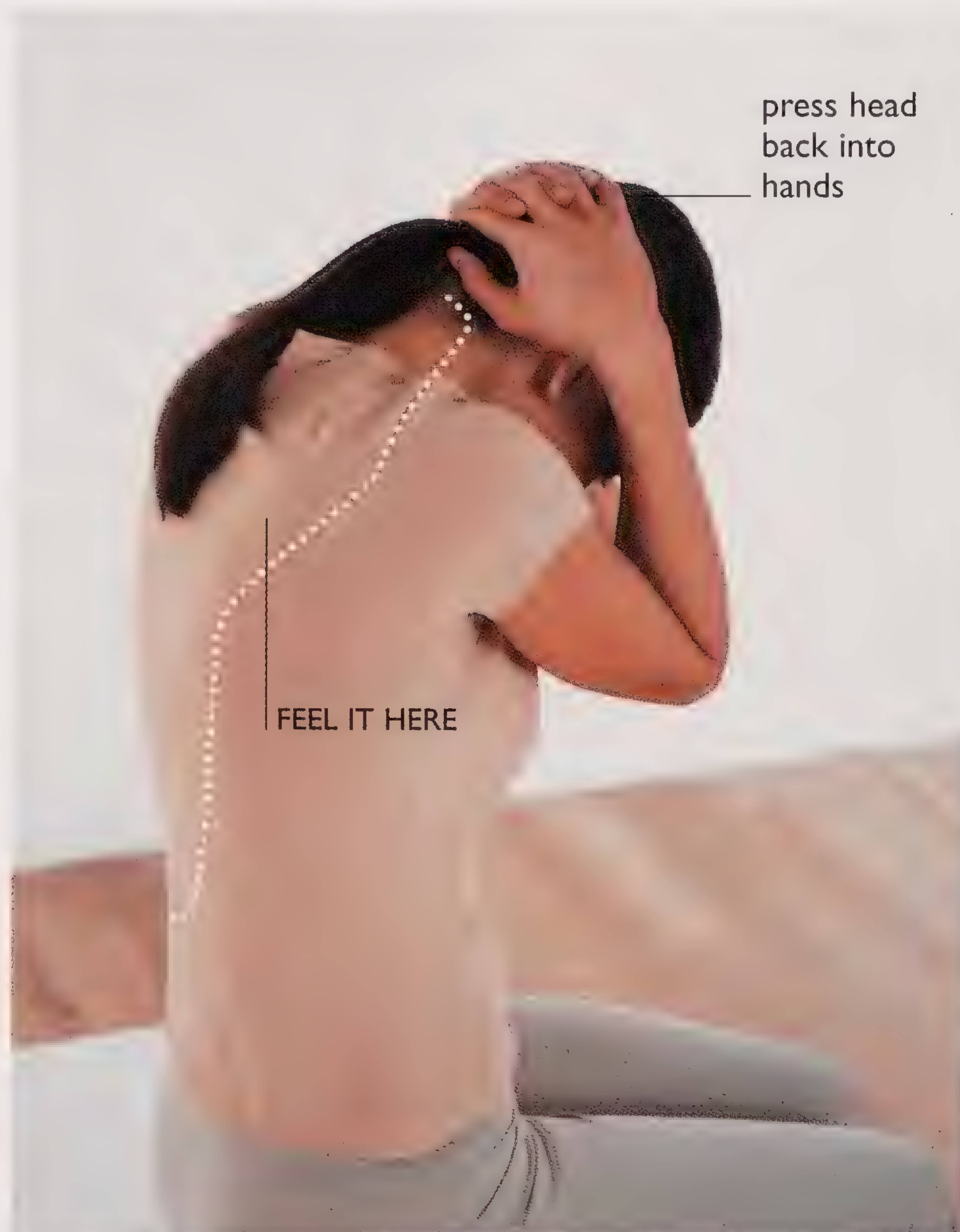
UPPER BACK FORWARD STRETCH

The key to this stretch is to tuck your chin in and imagine that an axis runs through your ears as you tilt your head forward. This is a delicate part of the body,

so perform this stretch slowly, rolling down your spine as you lower your head. This stretch can bring enormous relief after long periods sitting or driving.



1 Sit slightly forward on the edge of a chair and clasp your hands behind your head. Fold your arms so that your elbows point forward, and tuck your chin into your chest. Keeping your abdominals tucked in, slowly rotate your head downward, imagining that an axis runs through your ears.



2 Keep your chin tucked into your chest as you roll your head downward while gently pressing your head back into your hands. Cave your chest and look at your breastbone. Feel a good stretch from your neck down through your upper back and hold for 2 breath cycles. Then slowly roll your head back up.

TWIST, ARMS CROSSED

Be sure to keep your head back and aligned over your pelvis so that you are sitting up tall as you perform this stretch. Keep your shoulders down as you twist. Imagine that your spine is a long towel twisting upon itself. Feel the long strips of muscle along the sides of the spine working.



1 Sit slightly forward on a chair, your feet flat on the floor. Cross your arms in front of you, and lift your elbows slightly so that they are just below chest height.



2 Exhale as you twist to the right and use your right hand to pull your left forearm around yourself. Look to the right. Hold for 2 breath cycles, then return to the forward position. Repeat on the other side.

SEATED TWIST

In this exercise, you push with one arm to leverage the twist and really stretch the spine. Protect your spine by pulling your abdomen in deeply as you try to maintain the longest vertical height. Only go as far as is comfortable. Feel a good stretch between and just below your shoulder blades.



1 Sit slightly forward on a chair, your feet flat on the floor. Cross your right hand over and hold onto your left shoulder. Hold the edge of the seat (or arm of a chair) with your left hand.



2 Twist to the left, increasing the stretch by pushing forward with your left hand on the seat. Pull your left shoulder back and hold for 2 breath cycles, then relax out of the stretch and repeat on the other side.



THE FISH

Lie on your back with knees bent, soles of your feet on the floor, and arms by your sides with palms facing down. Pull your navel into your spine and arch your lower back upward. Press down on your elbows and slide your head in, arching your upper body. Feel the muscles between your shoulder blades working, as well as the stretch across your upper chest. Hold for 2 breath cycles, then support yourself on your elbows as you slide your head out and straighten your back on the floor.



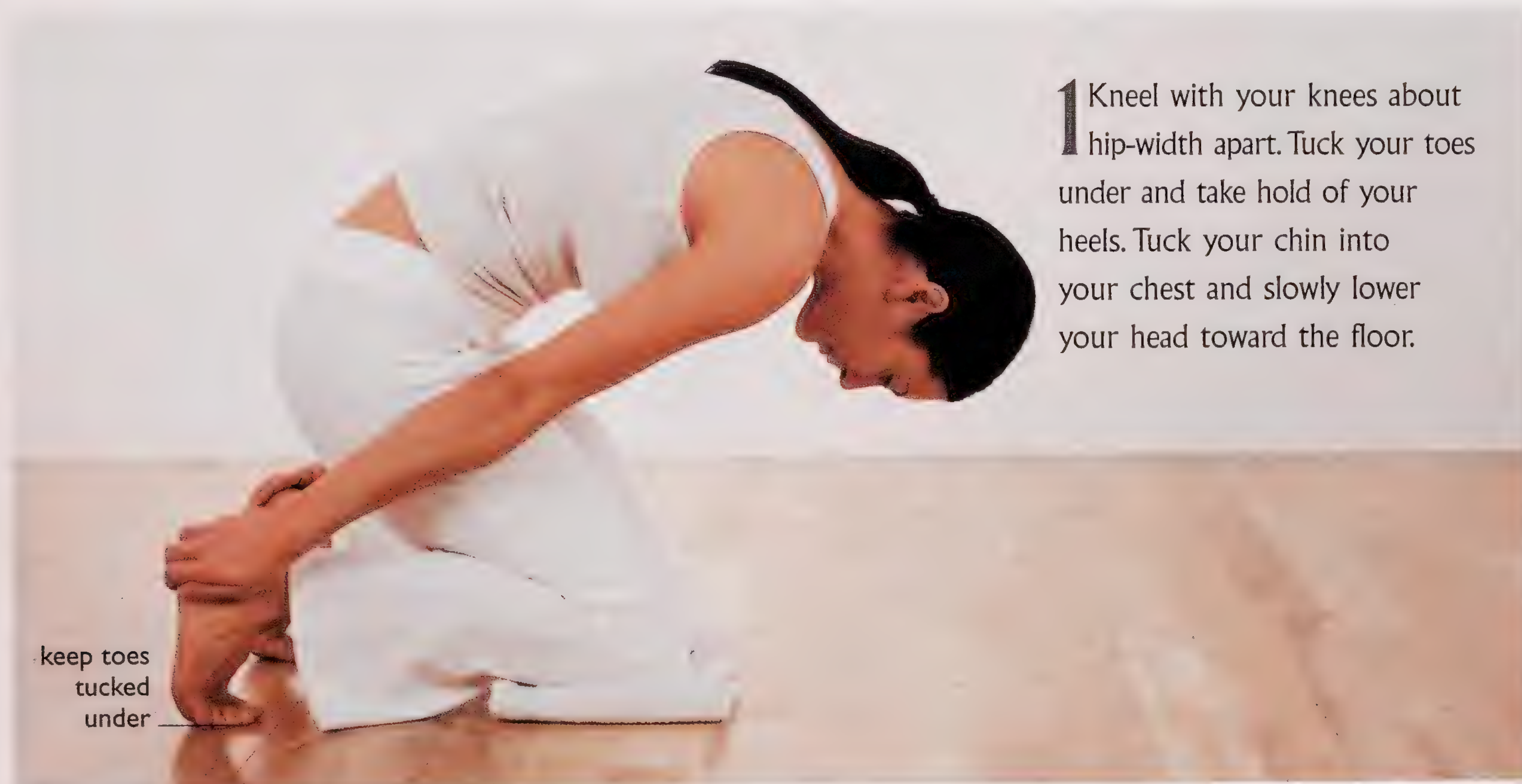
INTENSIFY THE STRETCH

Grab your buttocks, arch your back up, roll your shoulders back, and tuck your elbows in. Gently lift your head off the floor and feel an increased stretch in your upper back, across your chest, and in the front of your neck. Slowly release by lowering your head to the floor and straightening your back.

HIPS UP

This stretch is great for opening a tight upper back. The key is to keep your chin tucked into your chest as you roll your head forward. You might want to

place a cushion or folded towel under your knees to make this position more comfortable. Be sure to roll forward slowly to keep balance and form.



1 Kneel with your knees about hip-width apart. Tuck your toes under and take hold of your heels. Tuck your chin into your chest and slowly lower your head toward the floor.



2 Push your hips upward as you curl your body forward and touch the crown of your head to the floor. Roll your head under, gently stretching your upper back. Hold for 2 breath cycles, then slowly roll back up.

LOWER BACK

A strong lower back keeps us upright against the force of gravity and also functions as a shock absorber, softening the impact when our feet hit the ground. Both prolonged sitting and standing can tighten and stiffen the lower back muscles. These stretches will improve suppleness and relieve muscle stiffness. If you experience discomfort when performing a stretch, come out of it immediately.

SEATED HEAD CURL

This is a good basic back stretch that you can do anywhere there's a chair. Curve your back by pulling your navel into your spine as you roll your head

toward your knees. Think of your pelvis anchoring down into the seat and the crown of your head reaching up and over a fence to help you to round your back.



1 Sit slightly forward on a chair, your feet flat on the floor. Sit up straight, tighten your abdominals, and grasp the backs of your thighs.



2 Tuck your chin into your chest, rotating your head down as if an imaginary axis runs through your ears. Round your back, caving your chest, and gently pull with your arms to curl your head toward your knees. Pull your navel into your spine and hold for 2 breath cycles. Slowly uncurl to the upright sitting position.

KNEES TO CHEST

Another basic back stretch, the key again is to tuck your chin into your chest as you curl up and pull your abdominals in. Imagine making yourself into

a perfectly round ball. You might want to place a folded towel or pillow under your shoulders to make this stretch more comfortable.



1 Lie on your back with your knees bent. Tighten your abdominals and lift your thighs toward your chest. Gently press your lower back into the floor as you reach forward and grasp your thighs.



2 Exhale and gently tuck your chin into your chest as you take hold of your shins and curl your head forward. Bring your shoulders toward your heels, and hold for 2 breath cycles, then relax down.

FEET OVER HEAD

Lie on your back. Bend your knees and, controlling the movement with your abdominals, slowly bring your feet up and back over your head so that they touch the floor behind you. Gently pull your calves with your hands. Find a comfortable position and hold for 2 breath cycles. Then slowly roll down, bringing your feet back to the floor.

FEEL IT HERE



HANGING WITH CROSSED ARMS

Pull your navel into your spine, lift your pelvic floor, and exhale as you tuck your chin into your chest and roll down to a comfortable position. Cross your arms and hold onto your upper arms or elbows. Round your back so that you are looking at your navel. Don't allow yourself to tip forward. Hold for 2 breath cycles, then slowly roll back up.



INTENSIFY THE STRETCH

Tighten your abdominals to pull your head in closer to your legs, and hold onto your ankles. Feel a good stretch down through your buttocks.

CROSSOVER REACH BACK

This advanced stretch opens both the lower back and the deep muscles of the pelvis. Be sure to hold your abdominals firmly into the spine and to keep the groin

lifted for support throughout the whole stretch. Come out of the stretch immediately if you experience any dizziness or if you feel light-headed.



1 Stand with your feet about hip-width apart. Exhale as you tuck your chin into your chest, bend your knees slightly, and roll your spine down to a comfortable position. Reach down with your arms. Be sure to keep your abdominals tucked in.



2 Reach across and grasp your right ankle with your left hand as you reach your right hand behind you toward the floor. Press down with your left hand to help support your hanging body weight. Hold for 2 breath cycles, then use your hands to help you to roll back up to upright. Repeat the stretch on the other side.

FEEL IT HERE

FEEL IT _____
HERE

INTENSIFY THE STRETCH

Reach back with your right arm, touching the floor with your fingertips. Exhale and bend your right knee slightly. Inhale, then exhale and walk your right fingertips further behind you. Inhale, then exhale and walk your fingertips a little further. Feel the stretch in your buttocks. Finally, exhale, release your arm hold, and roll up.

WAIST

The corset-like muscles of the waist protect the vital organs, support the spine, and connect the upper and lower bodies. The waist is the malleable part of the torso that enables the bony structures of the ribcage and pelvis to twist in different directions. The waist has a tendency to slump and collapse; regular stretching can help to lengthen the muscles so that they can be properly strengthened.

STANDING WAIST TWIST

Stand with feet about hip-width apart. Place your right hand, fingers pointing down, firmly on the right side of your lower back. Pull your navel into your spine and, leading with your left hand, twist diagonally up and around to the right. Feel a good stretch in the left side of your waist and up the body. Hold for 2 breath cycles, then release. Repeat, twisting to the other side.



SEATED WAIST STRETCH

To get the full benefit of this stretch, elongate both sides of the torso as you reach up. Focus on stretching

up and then over as you reach to the side. Gaze ahead and hold yourself back to keep from leaning forward.



1 Sit slightly forward on a chair, feet flat on the floor. Reach up with your right hand; hold onto the chair with your left hand.

2 Press down on the chair with your left hand as you stretch your right hand up and over your head. Imagine that your back is flat against a wall. Hold for 2 breath cycles, then release. Repeat on the other side.

FEEL IT HERE

bend elbow slightly

pull sideways with third finger



LYING WAIST TWIST

Lie on your back. Extend your arms at your sides, and hold your abdominals firm as you cross your right knee over toward the floor on your left side. Bend your left leg slightly. Press your right knee toward the floor while pushing your right hip forward. Hold for 2 breath cycles, then gently release and repeat on the other side.

look to the right

FEEL IT HERE



HIPS

The muscles surrounding the hip joints and pelvis are dense due to the fact that they must bear the weight of the entire upper body. We have both deep hip flexors, muscles that run from the front of the spine to the top inner thigh, and superficial hip flexors, which run from the hip bone to the knee. Walking develops these muscles, and they benefit greatly from being stretched.

FRONT HIP STRETCH

This stretch targets both the deep and the superficial hip flexors. Feel it by tucking your pelvis under.



1 Place your hands on your hips, and step forward with your left foot. Stand with one leg forward, both knees slightly bent.



2 Tuck your pelvis under and lift your back, right heel, bending your leg slightly. Lean back onto the toes of your right foot to isolate the muscles at the front of the hip. Hold for 3 breath cycles, then release and repeat on the other side.

SIDE HIP STRETCH

Stand with your left leg crossed in front of your right, the toes of your left foot touching the floor. Raise your right arm up, and place your left hand on the left side of your pelvis. Tighten your abdominals and stretch over to the left as you push in with your left hand. Feel the stretch in the right side of your pelvis. Hold for 4 breath cycles, then release and repeat on the other side.



FEEL IT
HERE

push with
left hand

LEG-CROSS HIP STRETCH

This stretch targets the muscles around the hip joints. It helps to improve flexibility and strength necessary for hip stability.



1 Sit comfortably with your legs crossed so that your right ankle is on your left thigh.



support the
back side of
the thigh

2 Pull your right ankle toward your left shoulder. Feel the stretch on the outside of your right hip and hold for 4 breath cycles. Release, and repeat on the other side.

THIGHS

The large muscles on the tops of the thighs, the quadriceps (quads), are called the bully of the body because they tend to dominate leg movements. Tight quads can cause painful knees, while the hamstrings in the backs of the thighs tend to cause lower back problems if they are not stretched. The inner thighs help to support the spine; it is essential that they are stretched and equally balanced too.

STANDING QUAD STRETCH

This is the basic quad stretch. Keep your bent knee aligned under your pelvis, and be careful not to let it veer to the side. As you stretch, avoid pulling too hard

on the foot—you should not experience any knee pain. If you have difficulty balancing, rest your free hand on a wall or chair for support.

1 Standing, bend your right leg and reach back with your right hand to grasp your right foot. Gently pull your right heel in toward your buttock.

FEEL IT HERE

bend knee slightly

2 Tuck your pelvis under and line up your knees. Reach up with your left arm and balance for 3 breath cycles. Repeat on the other side.

keep shoulder down

FEEL IT HERE

hold knees together



INNER THIGH SQUAT

Stand with feet a little wider than shoulder-width apart, toes pointing slightly outward. Place your hands on your thighs for support, and squat down, tucking your pelvis under. Feel a good stretch across both inner thighs and hold for 3 breath cycles.



INTENSIFY THE STRETCH

In the squatting position, place your hands on the insides of your knees and twist your upper body to the right. Look to the right and press back with your left hand to increase the stretch along your left inner thigh. Repeat on the other side.

OUTER THIGH STRETCH

This slightly more advanced stretch is sometimes easier to perform sitting on a large book such as a

telephone directory or a short stool. It stretches the abductors, the muscles on the outsides of the thighs.



1 Sit comfortably with your legs crossed. If you can, line your knees up on top of each other. Firmly grasp a foot in each hand. Be sure to cross your legs only as far as is comfortable.



2 Gently pull up and back on your feet, and bend your head slightly forward, if you can. Feel a strong stretch along the side of your top leg. Hold for 4 breath cycles. Repeat with your legs crossed the other way.

STANDING HAMSTRING STRETCH

Stand on your left foot and place the heel of your right foot ahead of you. Tilt your torso forward and place your hands just above your right knee. Pull your navel into your spine and flatten your back until you feel the stretch in the back of your right thigh. Hold for 3 breath cycles, then release and repeat on the other side.



SUPPORTED HAMSTRING STRETCH

Stand on your left foot and place your right heel on a support that is ideally no higher than mid-thigh. The knee of your raised leg should be comfortable for this advanced stretch. Place your hands on your right thigh, lengthen your torso, and lean forward over your propped up leg. Hold for 4 breath cycles. Release and repeat on the other side.



LYING HAMSTRING STRETCH

Step 1 provides a simple and effective hamstring stretch and can be performed on its own, if preferred. Step 2

intensifies the stretch slightly. Remember to pull your abdominals in to support your back.



1 Lie down and gently pull your right leg toward you with your left leg slightly bent on the floor. Tuck your chin into your chest to help support your neck and spine, and flatten your abdominals, pulling them in. If performing just this step of the stretch, hold for 4 breath cycles, then release and repeat on the other leg.

2 Straighten your left leg on the floor, and press your calf down as you gently pull your right thigh toward you. Lower your head to the floor. Hold for 4 breath cycles, then release and repeat on the other leg.



INTENSIFY THE STRETCH

Grasp the outside of your right foot with your left hand and pull it toward you and slightly over to the left. To intensify the stretch further, press your hand against your right thigh.



CALVES

The calves become tight from the strain of working to hold us up when we are standing and then shortening as we sit or lie down. Tight calves may contribute to lower back problems as well as Achilles' tendon and foot complaints. You need to perform two exercises to stretch the calf muscle fully since it consists of two parts, one originating from above the knee, the other from below it.

BASIC LUNGE

The key to this stretch is to ensure that your tailbone points down toward the floor and not to the back heel as you lunge.



1 Place your hands on your hips, and take a large step forward with your left foot. Be sure to keep your back straight and your shoulders back and down.

2 Bend your left leg but don't allow the knee to extend beyond your toes. Gently shift your weight forward, keeping your right heel on the floor. Hold the stretch for 4 breath cycles, then release. Repeat with your right leg stepped forward.



STEP DROP

This targets the soleus, the bottom calf muscle that runs into the Achilles' tendon, and can help to prevent injury there.



1 Stand with your toes and the balls of your feet on a step, your weight forward. Hold onto a support for balance, if needed. Lift your heels as high as you can.

2 Slowly lower your heels below the step line until you feel a good stretch in your lower calves. Hold for 4 breath cycles.



FEEL IT HERE

hold support
to help control
stretch

ANKLES AND FEET

An often neglected area of the body, our overused ankles and feet benefit from regular stretching. The foot is made up of 26 bones, and the sole has four layers of muscles and tendons. As we know from reflexology, stretching the soles of the feet can affect the whole body, from the internal organs to the musculoskeletal system. Stretching the feet can help to relieve muscle tension in the hips.

FOOT POINTER



Sit comfortably with one leg crossed over the other so that you can reach your foot. Grasp the front of your foot with one hand. Elongate the top of the foot away from the shinbone while gently pressing the heel up into the back of the calf. Feel the front of the ankle opening up, and hold for 4 breath cycles. Release and repeat on the other foot.

SIDE FOOT STRETCH



Sit comfortably with one leg crossed over the other. Gently grasp the front of your foot and pull your toes in toward you. Hold for 3 breath cycles, then press your toes away from you, again holding the stretch for 3 breath cycles. Release and repeat on the other foot.



ANKLE CIRCLES

Sit or stand to perform this stretch. Moving clockwise, slowly trace the shape of a large circle with your toes. Circle your foot 5 times clockwise, then repeat, circling counter-clockwise. Perform large circular motions. Repeat with the other foot.

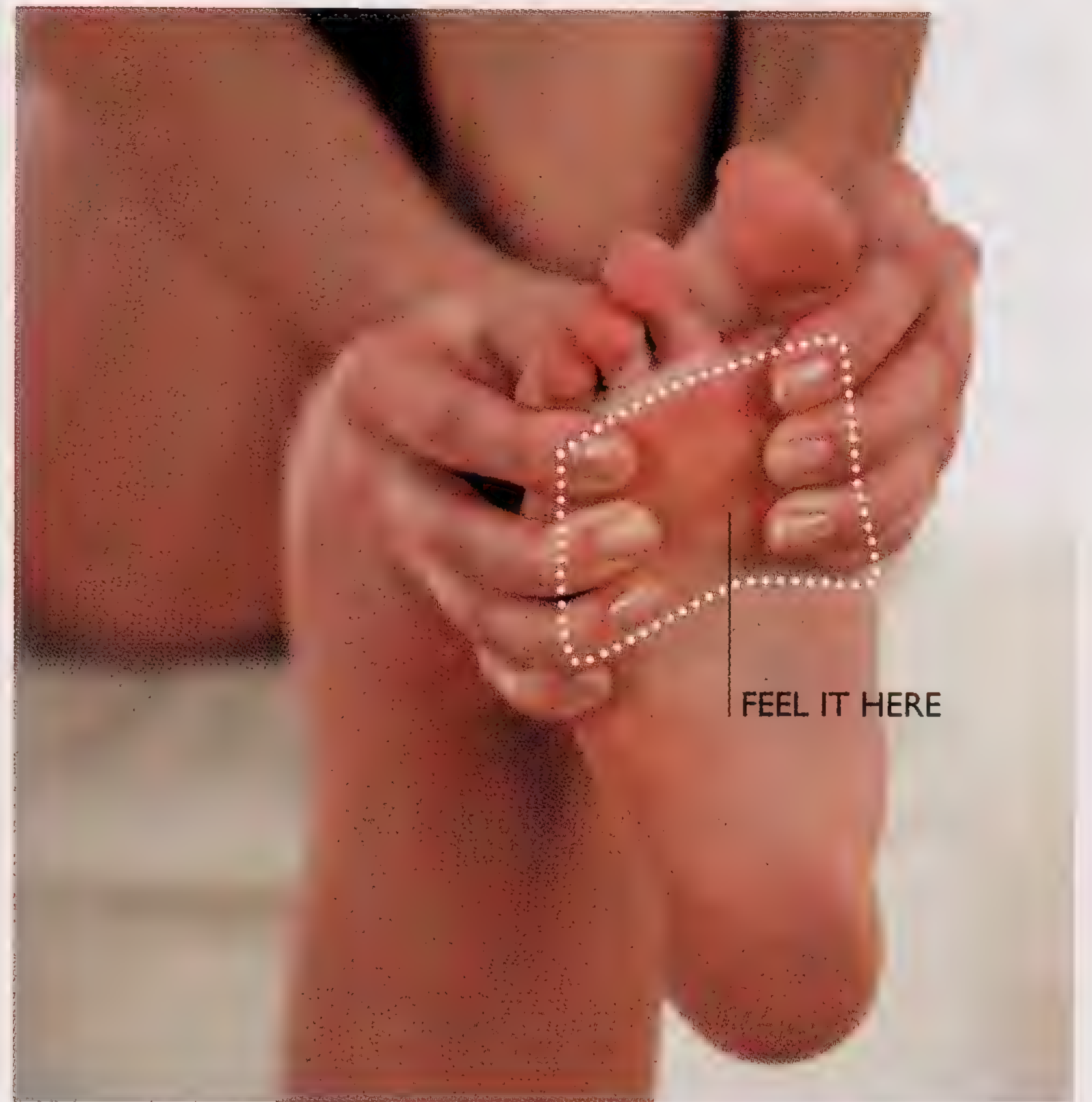
TRANSVERSE ARCH

You should be able to bend your toes to expose your knuckles, just as you do on your hand when you make a fist. The knuckles on your toes should slope down,



1 Grasp your foot with both hands so that your fingers meet under your knuckle arch. Slowly and firmly spread the knuckles apart as you apply upward pressure with your fingers. Repeat 5 times.

with the big toe knuckle the highest and the little toe the lowest. Here you position your fingers under the foot and stretch the top and then the bottom of it.



2 Position your thumbs next to each other on top of your foot. Press down firmly as you open and stretch the bottom of your foot with your fingers. Do this 5 times. Repeat both steps on the other foot.



TOE BEND

Sit comfortably and lift your foot so that the sole faces away from you. Grasp your heel to keep your foot steady, and firmly pull your toes up toward your shin. Tuck your fingers under the pads of your toes and pull and lengthen rather than just bending your toes back. Hold for 3 breath cycles, then repeat on the other foot.



21-DAY POSTURE PROGRAM

We carry heavy bags, hunch over desks, work at computers, and hold our bodies in awkward positions. Most of our day-to-day activities are performed with our arms and hands—in front of us—which accentuates our natural tendency to hunch forward. Posture deteriorates as the framework of our muscles is slowly pulled out of alignment. But help is at hand. Follow this simple program and learn how a short, daily stretching routine can rebalance your muscles and help to achieve a straighter, sleeker, and more dynamic you.

USING THE PROGRAM

The program's ultimate goal is to produce the tallest, most vertical you that is possible. It targets typical problem areas by rebalancing and reconditioning your muscles, helping you to achieve your ideal posture (*see pp.10–11*). Set aside just 15 minutes every day and you'll be amazed by what you can achieve—by how different you not only feel but look by the end of the program. You will notice the effects immediately, but they will last and only improve over time.



Studies have shown that bad postural habits can be relearned. By following the program, you can achieve a visible improvement in posture within just 21 days, three weeks. The program focuses on typical postural problems, most of which can be corrected with simple stretches that balance the muscles. Stretches that open the chest, tighten the abdominals, and lengthen the lower back counteract the body's natural tendency to hunch the shoulders forward and slouch. You will learn how to sit and stand with correct posture, as well as improve general muscle flexibility.

Getting results

The key to success is to take the program into your daily life as well as setting aside time to do your routine every day. Perform each routine at least once daily—it should only take about 15 minutes. Then reinforce the program by using the week's cue to prompt you to check your posture as you go about your daily activities. The cueing technique teaches you body awareness, so you train your mind to strive for good posture as well as your body.

If possible, ask someone to take a picture of you in profile on day one of the program. Then ask them to take a final picture on day 21 and compare the two. You can't fail to be impressed by the improvement.

Muscle balancing can bring about dramatic improvements in posture. Check your posture constantly, and correct the inevitable tendency to slump forward. Stand straight; sit tall.

WEEK ONE

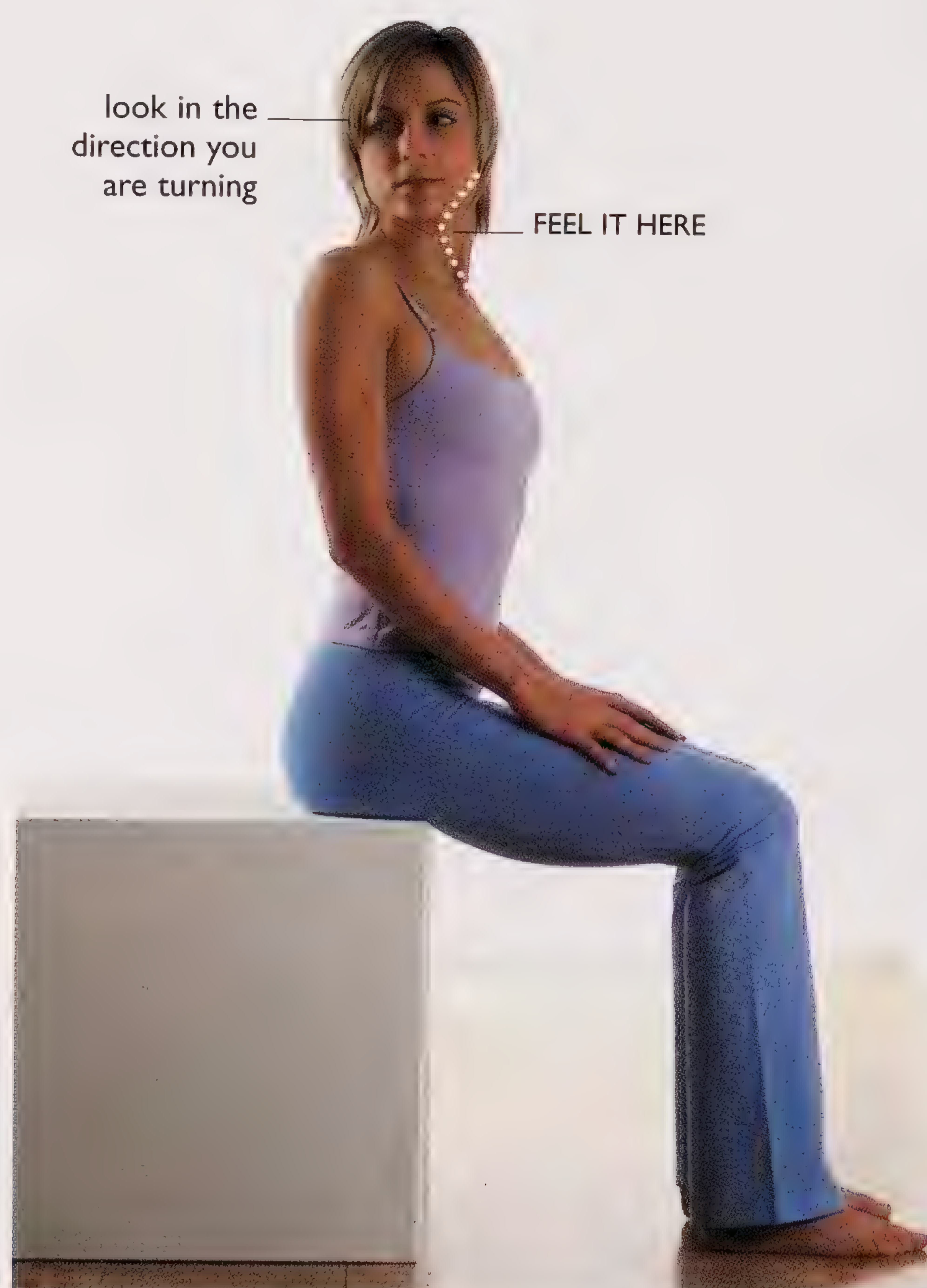
These seated stretches address the body's tendency to hunch forward and will help to encourage good posture when sitting. Keep your head aligned over your pelvis and your shoulders back and down. Begin by sitting slightly forward on a chair, your feet flat on the floor. Allow 15 minutes to complete this routine.

WEEK ONE CUE

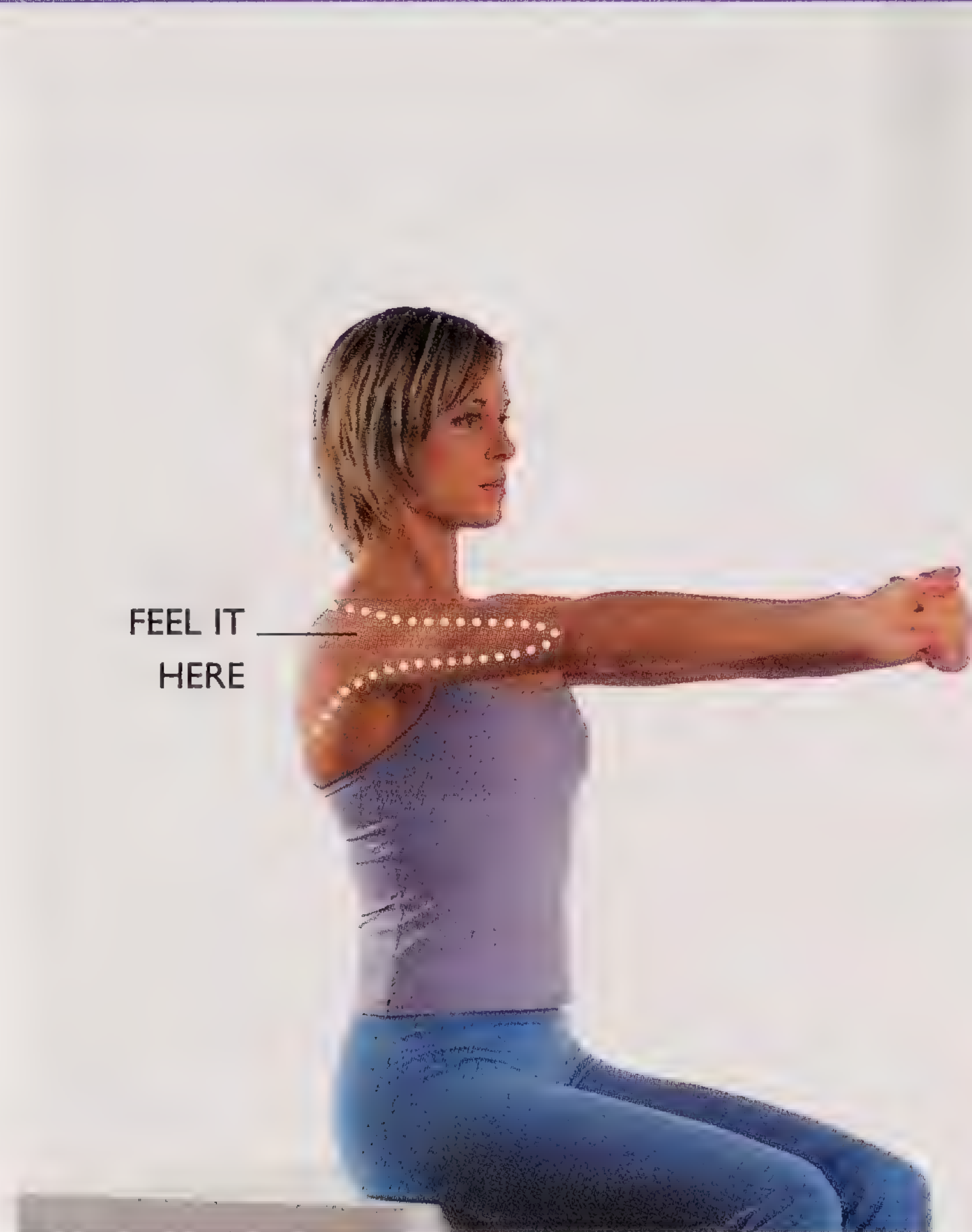
Imagine that your head is a bowling ball. This week, every time that you eat, practice balancing this bowling ball on top of a long giraffe neck. Be aware of the slight nuances that a head tilt can create, and how other body parts feel as a result.



1 Sit tall with your back straight. Open your chest by pulling your shoulders back and down. Keep your head aligned over your pelvis and bring your ears back, dropping your chin slightly. Gently press the back of your neck against an imaginary wall while at the same time sliding your head upward. Hold for 4 breath cycles, then relax.



2 With your head aligned over your pelvis and your chin on the same level, turn your head toward your right shoulder. Feel every degree of the rotation, and make the turn as smooth and circular as possible. Go as far as is comfortable. Look to the right. Hold for 4 breath cycles, then repeat, turning your head to the left. Return to center.



3 Clasp your hands in front of you: If you normally place your right index finger over your left, reverse it here. Push forward, palms facing out. Hold for 4 breath cycles; stretch a little further forward with each breath.



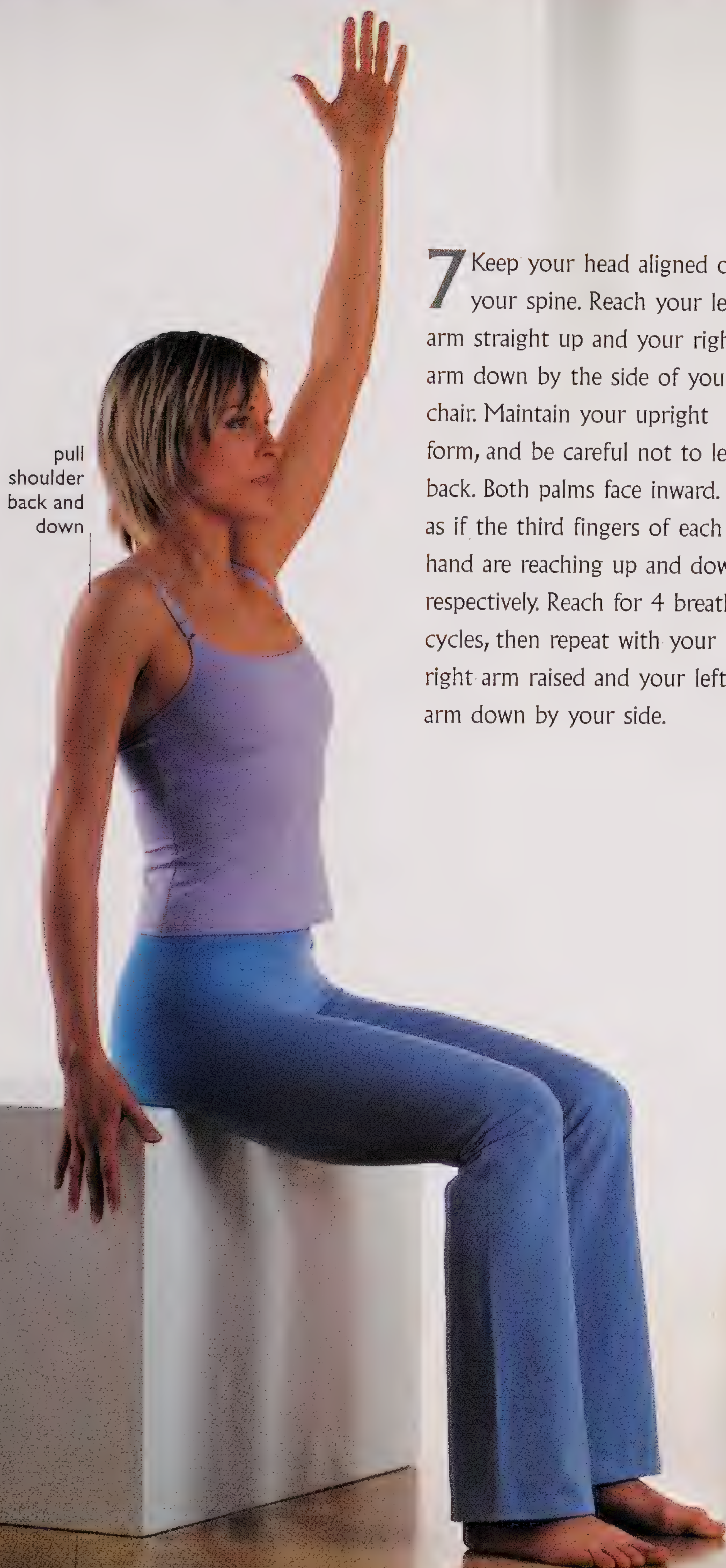
4 Inhale and reach your arms overhead. Try to keep your shoulders down and away from your ears. Press your palms up toward the ceiling for 4 breath cycles; try to stretch a little further up with each breath.



5 Lower your hands so that they are just below chest level, palms still turned outward. Gently tilt your chin down, imagining an axis that runs from ear to ear, and look toward your navel. Press your hands outward and slightly down, feeling the stretch in your shoulders and across your upper back. Hold for 4 breath cycles.



6 With fingers still clasped and palms out-turned, raise your hands to chest level in front of you. Keeping your head aligned over your pelvis, twist around to the right. Move your hands to the right, letting your right fingers squeeze and pull your left hand to the right. Hold for 4 breath cycles, then repeat on the left side.



7 Keep your head aligned over your spine. Reach your left arm straight up and your right arm down by the side of your chair. Maintain your upright form, and be careful not to lean back. Both palms face inward. Feel as if the third fingers of each hand are reaching up and down respectively. Reach for 4 breath cycles, then repeat with your right arm raised and your left arm down by your side.



8 Reach your right heel forward on the floor in front of you and point your toes up. Place your hands on your thigh. Keep your back flat, and lean forward slightly over your outstretched leg, tilting from your hips. Feel the stretch behind the buns and in the back of your outstretched leg. Hold for 4 breath cycles, then repeat on the other side.

WEEK TWO

In Week One, you learned awareness of your body when sitting. Now we bring that awareness to standing. In Week Two, continue with the seated exercises from Week One, but add this five-minute sequence of standing stretches. These exercises encourage proper alignment of the head, spine, and pelvis when standing.

WEEK TWO CUE

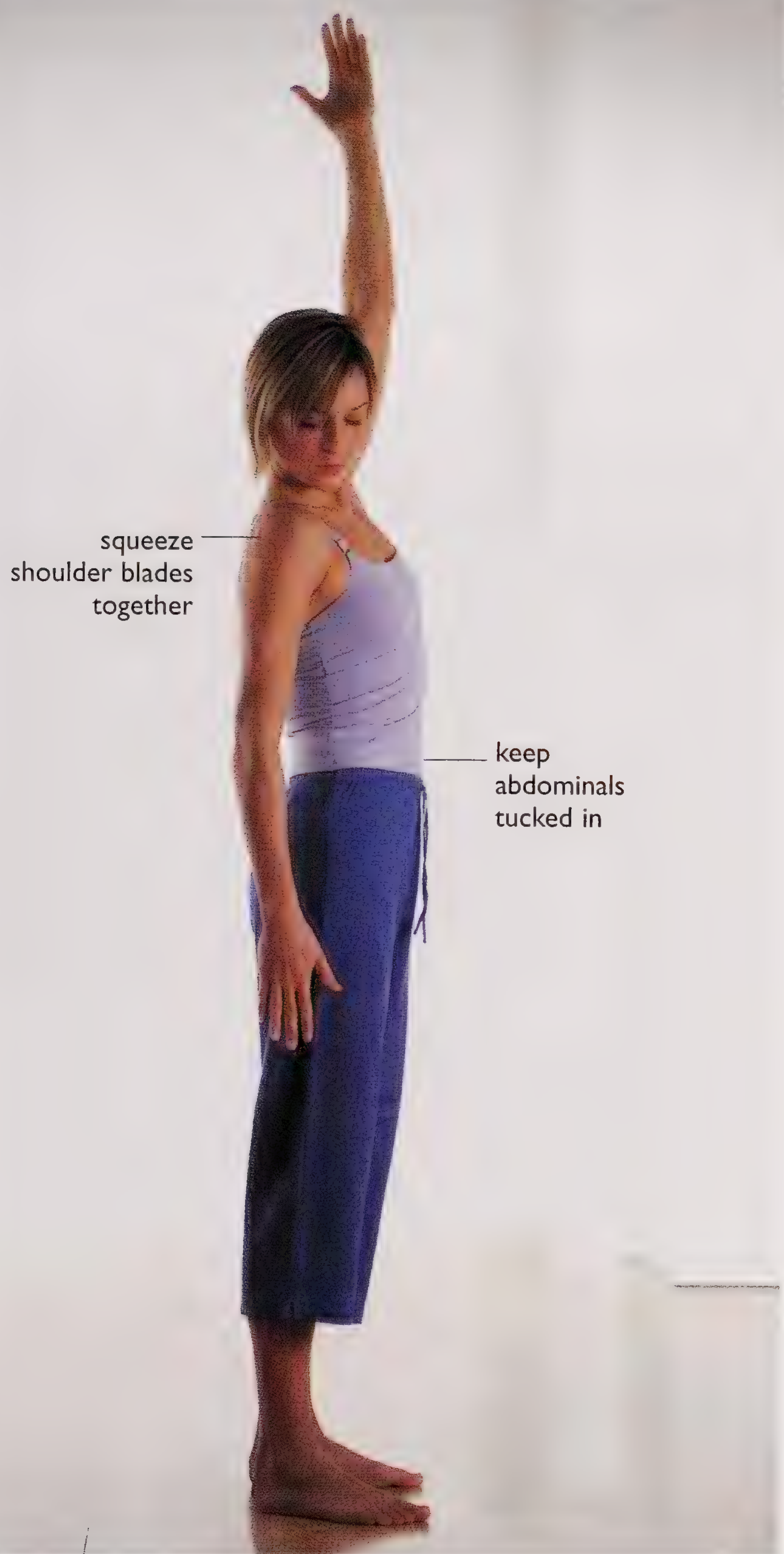
Imagine that a horizontal shelf extends from your breastbone out into the space in front of you. Balance a glass on this shelf. Whenever you see a smile this week, check your posture and “balance the glass on the B-shelf.”



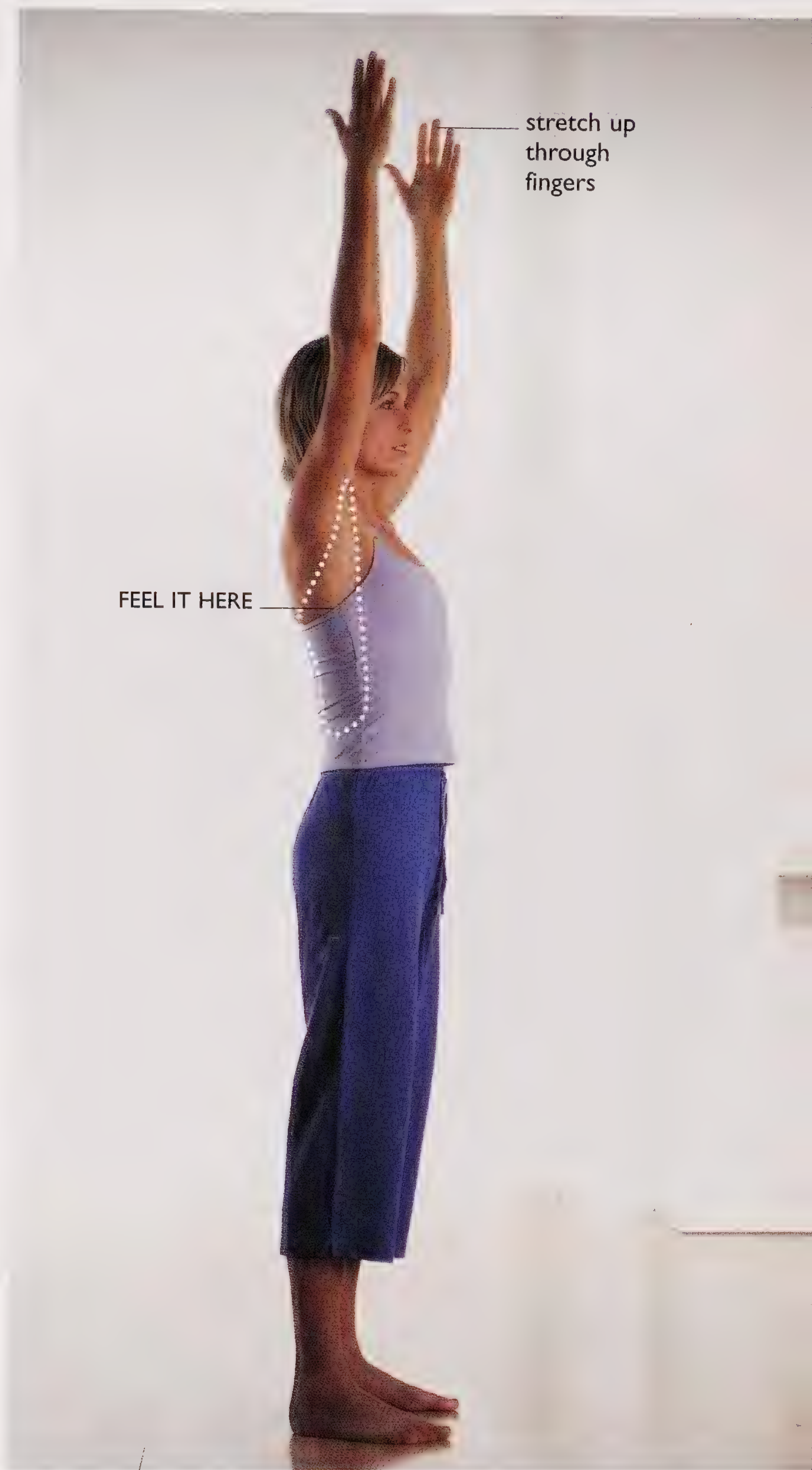
1 Stand with feet just less than hip-width apart. Check that your head is aligned over your pelvis. You may need to move your pelvis slightly forward so that your center of gravity falls in between the arches of your feet. Pull your navel into your spine, and lift the whole abdominal area from the pubis to the navel. Hold for 4 breath cycles, then relax.



2 Place your hands, fingers pointing down, on your lower back. Lift your chest up by balancing the imaginary glass on the “B-shelf.” Turn your shoulders to the right, imagining that someone is pulling your right elbow behind you. Look to your right, turning your chin on the same level until you feel a comfortable stretch. Hold for 4 breath cycles, then repeat, turning to the left.



3 Reach one arm up and the other down by your side. Turn your palms to face in, and imagine that someone is pulling the third fingers of each hand up and down respectively. As you reach up with your top hand, look down toward your bottom hand, pulling it down further. Hold for 4 breath cycles, then release. Repeat with the opposite arm raised.



4 Stand straight. Keep your head back against an imaginary wall. Lengthen and open your waist by lifting your ribcage. Reach both arms up as high as you comfortably can. Bring your shoulders down away from your ears, but keep the length of the waist. Imagine that someone is pulling the tips of your third fingers up toward the ceiling. Hold for 4 breath cycles, then relax.

WEEK THREE

In the final week of the program, you perform a new set of stretches. Now the focus is mobility. Your posture should be erect but your body should be lithe. These deep stretches encourage more spine rotation and will also improve stride length. Pay attention to technique when performing this 15-minute routine.

WEEK THREE CUE

Imagine that you are a puppet with strings attached to your head, hands, and knees. Every time you walk somewhere, think of these strings pulling up your head, swinging your arms, and lifting your knees. Your body is aligned; walking is effortless.



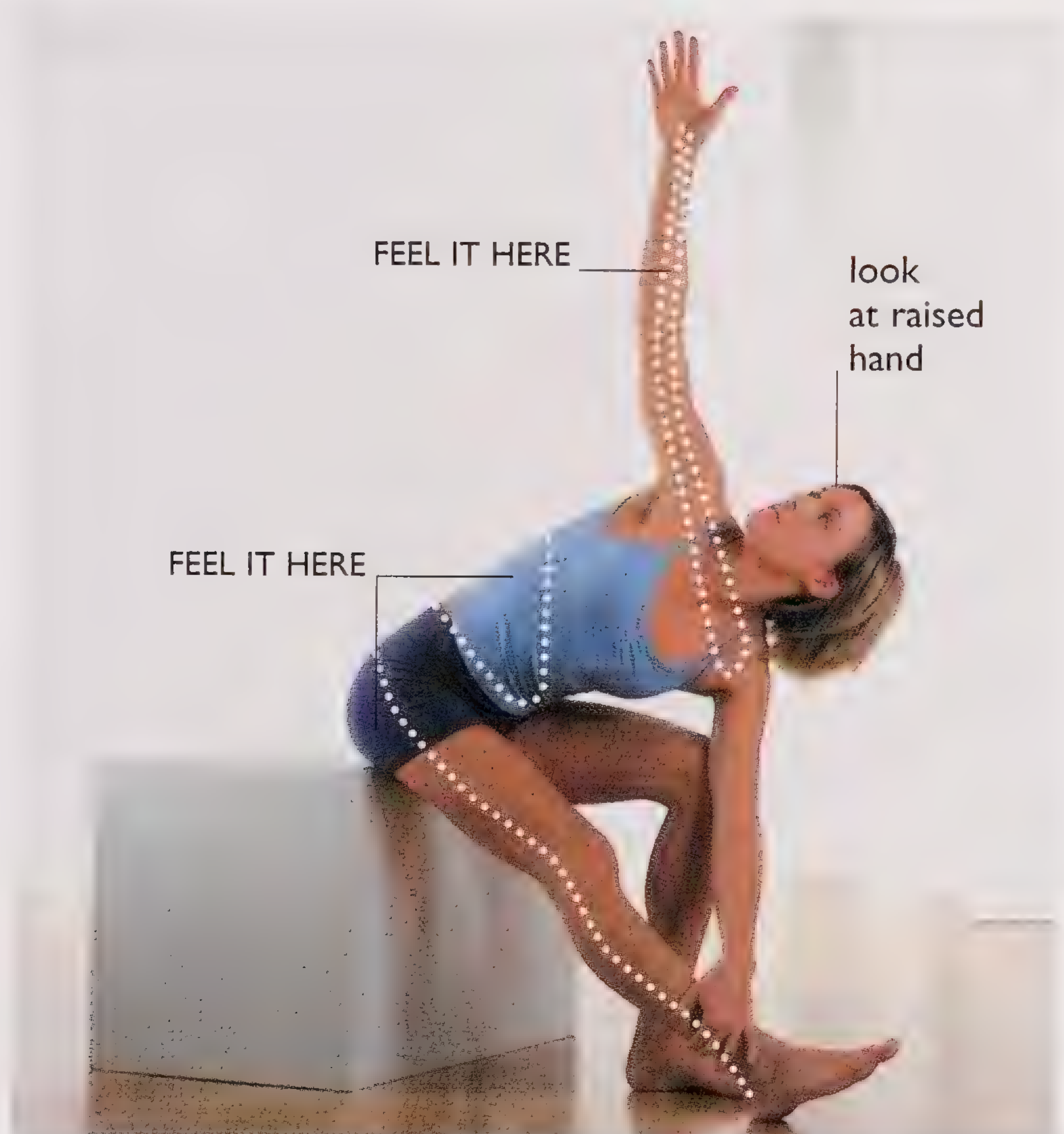
1 Sit slightly forward on a chair, your feet flat on the floor. Lean forward, hinging from your hips, and place your left elbow between your knees. Twist to the right, pulling your left shoulder downward and pressing your left elbow against your left thigh to twist further. Feel the stretch under your arm, across your chest, and through your right hip. Hold for 4 breath cycles, then repeat on the other side.



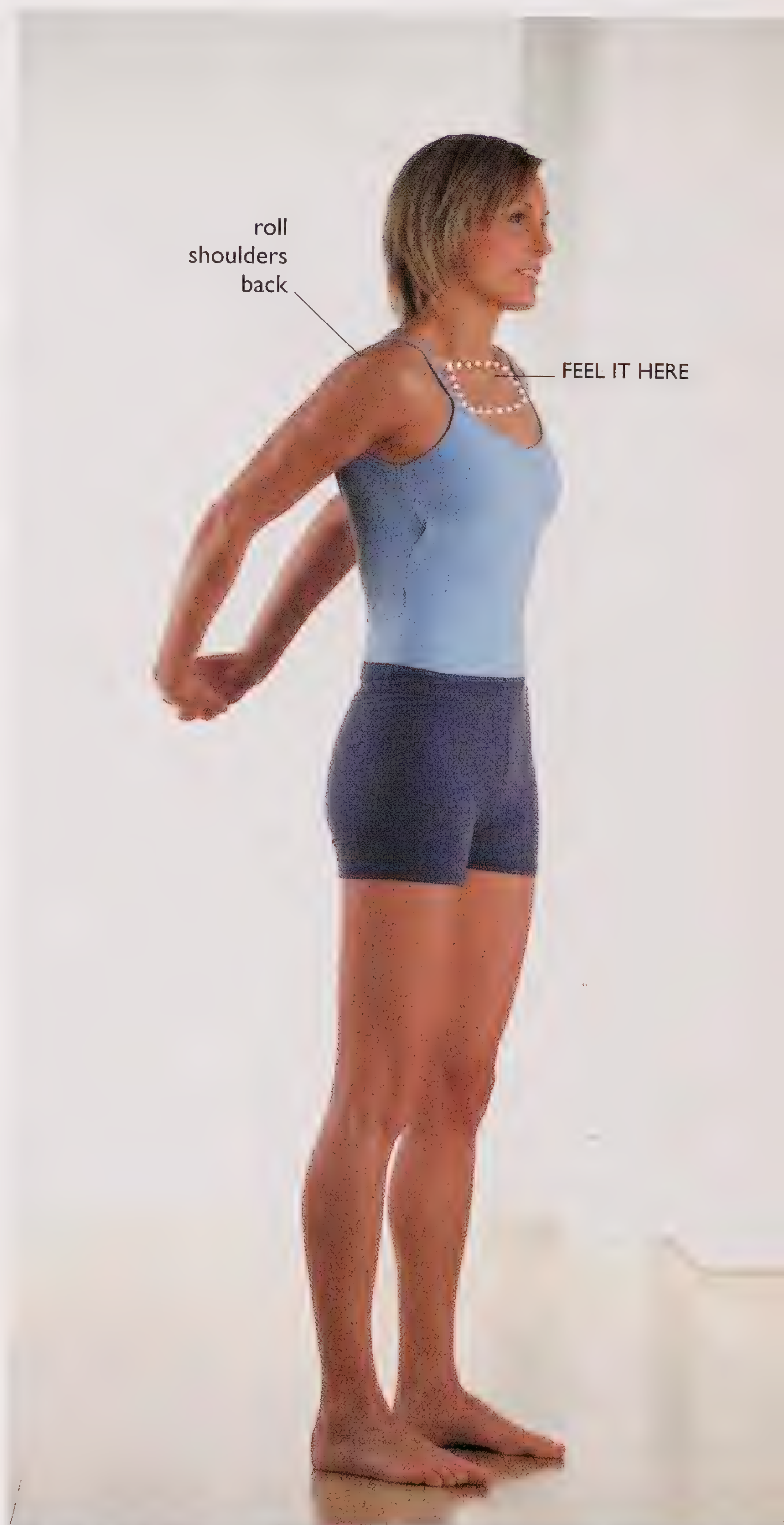
2 Still seated, lean forward and position your left upper arm between your knees. Hold onto your right ankle, and slowly reach your right hand up toward the ceiling. Turn your head and look up at your hand. Hold the stretch for 4 breath cycles, then repeat on the other side. Sit upright.



3 Place your right heel in front of you, straightening, or partially straightening, your leg. Lean forward, flattening your back. Hold onto your shin or ankle, whichever is most comfortable. Stay for 4 breath cycles, then repeat on the other side. Return to sitting upright.



4 Place your right heel in front of you again, with your leg straight. Lean forward and grasp the shin or ankle of your right leg with your left hand. Reach up with your right hand, twisting as far as is comfortable. Hold for 4 breath cycles. Repeat on the other side.



5 Stand with feet just less than hip-width apart (as for the standing exercises in Week Two). Clasp your hands behind you and reach back as far as you can, being sure to keep your head aligned over your pelvis and your chin slightly tucked. Hold for 4 breath cycles.

3 Place your hands on your hips. Hold onto something for balance, if needed. Keep your back straight, and swing one leg straight up in front of you.



4 Then swing your leg down and back. Feel the weight of your leg come down with your foot and rotate the toes gently outward. Repeat the swinging motion, steps 3 and 4, 10 times, then do the same with the other leg.



5 Lift one foot and circle it 6 times clockwise and 6 times counter-clockwise. Then repeat with the other foot.



6 Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart, your hips tucked under. Bend both elbows and make loose fists with your hands. Raise your arms to shoulder height and cross them in front of your chest.



7 Pull your elbows out to the sides and press back to open your chest. Hold your torso steady and keep your arms bent. Then cross your elbows back in front of your chest as in step 6.



8 Gently swing your elbows back, opening your arms and throwing your hands back. Then bring your arms in and return to the step 6 start position with elbows crossed in front of your chest. Repeat steps 6–8, alternating this hook and swing motion, 6 times.

9 Keep your hips tucked under, and pull your navel into your spine. With elbows loose, swing your arms up and cross your wrists above your head.



10 Swing your arms down and behind you. Repeat this alternating up-and-down swinging motion, steps 9 and 10, 6 times.



11 Place your left hand on your hip and cross your right foot over your left. Tuck your hips under to help focus the stretch in the front of the IT band, the tendon that runs down the side of the hip and thigh. Stretch your right arm up, and lean into your left hip. Hold for 4 breath cycles. Repeat on the other side.

FEEL IT HERE

lean into
hip of
standing leg



12 Stand straight with chest lifted and arms by your sides. Curl your fingers and wrists under as if trying to touch the insides of your forearms. Feel the stretch in your outer forearms and hold for a count of 3, then release.



13 Curl your fingers and wrists up, feeling the stretch in your inner forearms. Hold for a count of 3, then release. Alternate between steps 12 and 13, curling your fingers under and up 6 times.



STRETCHES FOR SPORTS

Stretching before sports helps to prepare the muscles for action and for moving into more strenuous positions than everyday life. After sports, it helps the tissues to relax and enables exercise by-products, which cause muscle soreness, to circulate out of the bloodstream. The stretches in the pages that follow will help you to meet the demands of each particular sport. Be sure to limber up with the Energizing Warm-up (see *pp.76–79*) before sports, then add on these extra stretches before and after your session. Whether you are swimming, cycling, or playing tennis, let the stretches presented here serve as your tailor-made sports routines.

TENNIS

The stretches here focus on the muscles of the upper body. Gripping the racket and performing the large movements of the forearm and backhand strokes can place great demands on the shoulders, arms, and hands. If possible, add the Outer Thigh Stretch (see p.45) to your routine to help knee health.

STRETCHING HELPS TO:

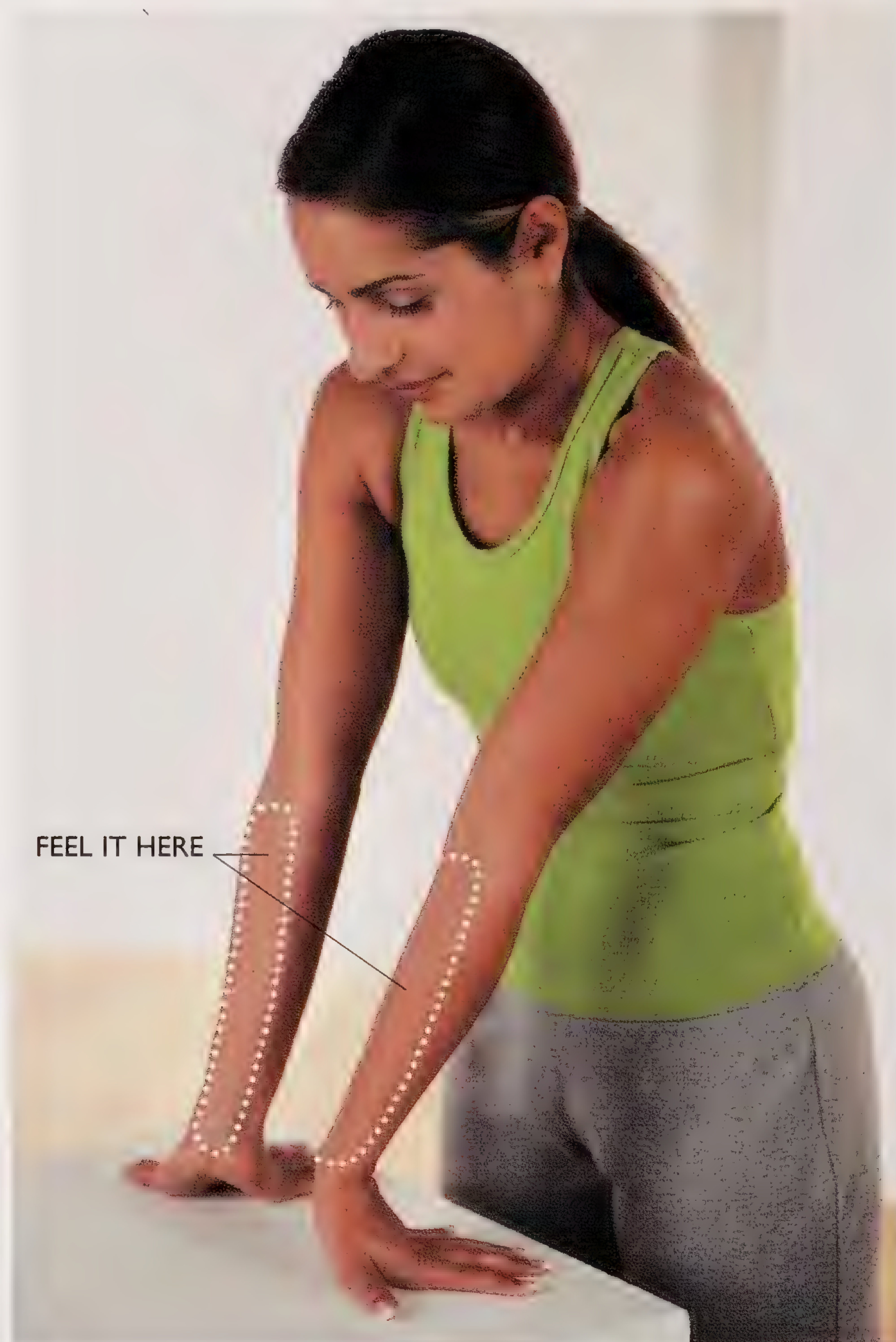
- **improve grip and handling** of the racket by refreshing forearm and hand muscles.
- **improve your reach**, which enables you to cover the court more effectively.

FOREARM EXTENSOR



Place your hands, knuckles down and fingers pointing toward you, on a surface in front of you. Lean your weight forward slightly, and roll with pressure toward your wrists. Lean back to increase the stretch along the fronts of your forearms. Hold for 3 breath cycles.

FOREARM FLEXOR



Place your hands, palms down and fingers splayed and pointing toward you, on a surface in front of you. Gently lean forward onto your palms, then pull back with your body to increase the stretch along the insides of your forearms. Hold for 3 breath cycles.

TRICEPS OVERHEAD

Stand with feet hip-width apart. Hold your abdominals firm and bend your knees slightly. Reach your right hand up and behind your head and place it in the middle of your upper back. With your left hand, gently pull your right elbow back and toward your left shoulder. Pull your ribcage down toward your chest to focus the stretch. Hold for 3 breath cycles, then repeat with your left arm.

FEEL IT HERE

hold mid-section
firm

MINI CATALOG

These stretches focus on the hands, arms, chest, and ribcage. Flexibility and strength in these areas will help to improve your game.



arms open p29
hold for 3 breath cycles



arm stretch p28
hold for 3 breath cycles



corner chest stretch p30
hold for 4 breath cycles



standing side stretch p31
hold for 4 breath cycles;
repeat on other side

GOLF

The motion of swinging a golf club involves twisting the spine, shoulders, and hips. Golfers also need to be able to shift their weight sideways from one leg to the other while keeping their feet on the ground. Stretching will improve your swing and protect your back. Be sure to include the Side Hip Stretch (*see opposite*).

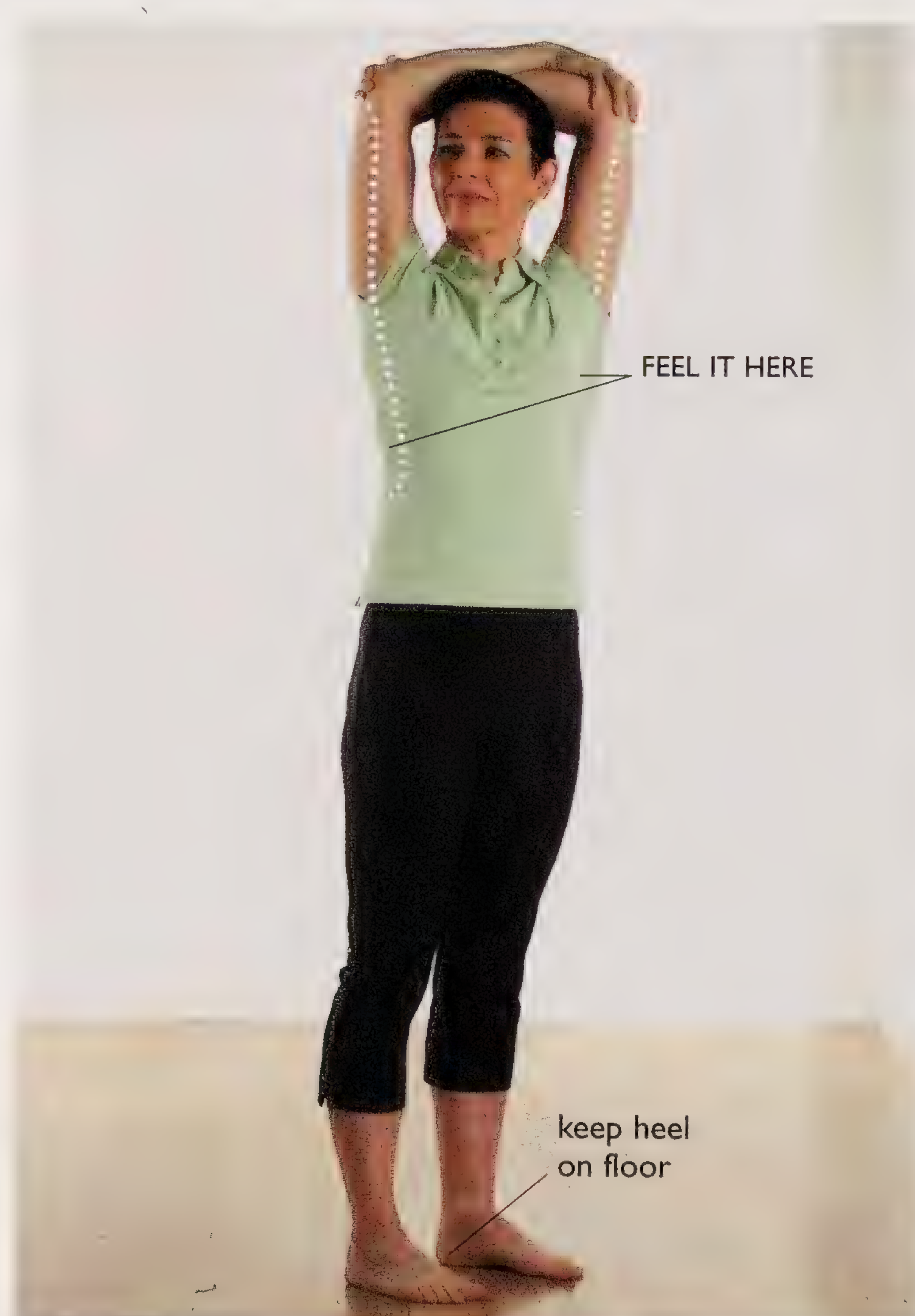
STRETCHING HELPS TO:

- **increase power** behind a swing by enabling better wind-up through increased back mobility.
- **improve follow-through** after a swing by increasing hip and shoulder mobility.

CROSSED ARMS TWIST



OVERHEAD CROSSED ARMS TWIST



Stand with feet hip-width apart. Squeeze your buns to anchor your lower body. Clasp your elbows and raise them to shoulder height. Twist your shoulders and upper body to the right. Gently pull your left elbow with your right hand, and look to the right. Hold for 4 breath cycles. Repeat, twisting to the left.

Stand with feet hip-width apart and chest lifted. Squeeze your buns to anchor your lower body. Reach your arms upward, holding the bottom of your ribcage down. Twist your upper body to the right. Keep your shoulders down and away from your ears, and hold for 3 breath cycles. Repeat, twisting to the left.

BACKWARD WRIST PULL

Stand with feet hip-width apart. Squeeze your buns to anchor your lower body. Roll your shoulders up and back, and grasp your left wrist behind you. Hold the bottom of your ribcage down as you lift your chest. Twist to the left, gently pulling your wrist to the right behind you. Hold for 3 breath cycles; repeat on the other side.

turn head in
direction of twist

FEEL IT HERE

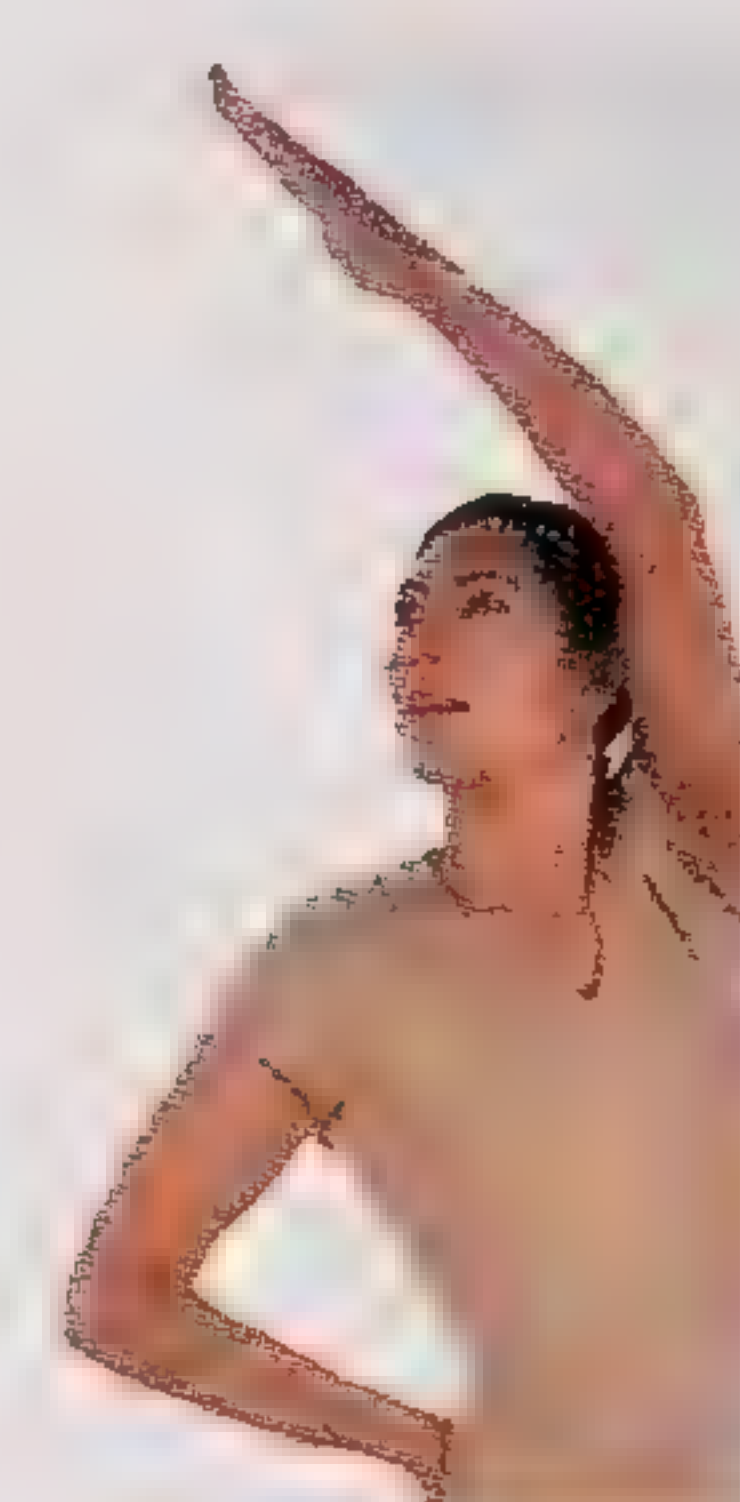


MINI CATALOG

Include this hand stretch to keep your grip strong yet precise, and add these torso and hip stretches to improve your swing.



clasped fingers p28
hold for 3 breath cycles



standing waist twist p40
hold for 2 breath cycles;
repeat on other side



front hip stretch p42
hold for 3 breath cycles;
repeat on other side



side hip stretch p43
hold for 4 breath cycles;
repeat on other side

SWIMMING

A daily upper body stretching routine is essential for swimmers. The front crawl in particular involves tremendous repetitive shoulder work, which can tighten the head, neck, and shoulder muscles. This can cause not only shoulder joint problems, but also nerve pinches and general muscle stiffness.

STRETCHING HELPS TO:

- **make front crawl breathing** easier by increasing the flexibility of your neck.
- **improve your stroke length** by loosening and rebalancing overworked shoulders.

EAR-TO-SHOULDER NECK STRETCH

Stand straight, lift your chest, and pull your navel into your spine. Reach your right hand behind you and grasp your left arm just above the elbow. Tuck your chin into your chest. Let your right ear drop toward your right shoulder as you gently pull your left arm down. Focus on the area from the tip of the shoulder to the ear, breathing into the stretch. Hold for 3 breath cycles, then repeat on the other side.

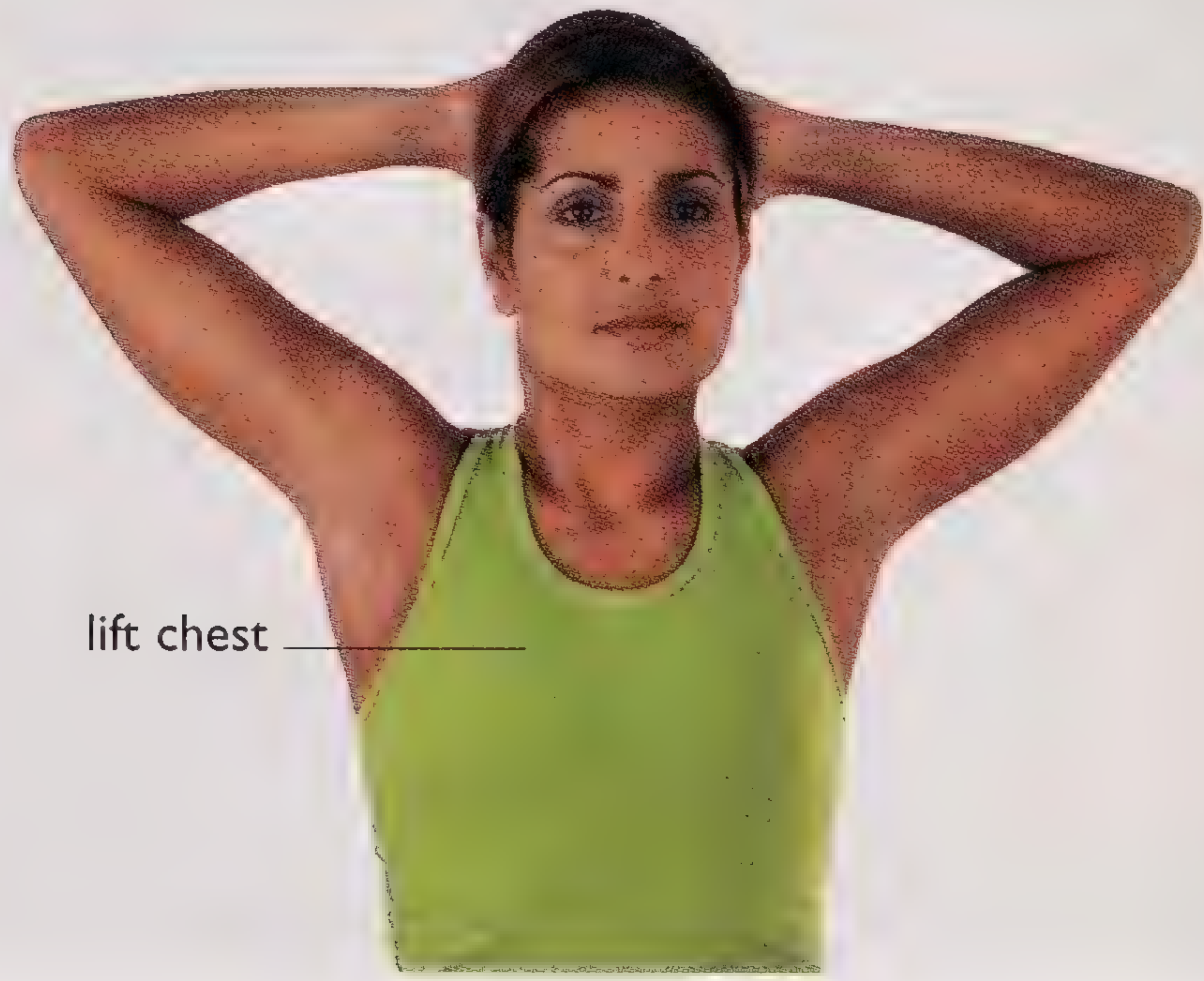
grasp arm
above elbow

FEEL IT
HERE

keep buns
firm



UPPER BACK SIDE-BEND AND TWIST



1 Stand straight, and pull your navel into your spine. Clasp your hands behind your head. Gently press your head back, open your elbows, and lift your chest.



2 Slowly tilt your body to the right by raising your left elbow so that it points upward. Inhale and exhale, feeling the stretch along your left arm. Don't allow your raised elbow to tilt forward.



3 Still leaning to the right, lower your left elbow so that both elbows point downward. Curve your chest as if rounding it over a ball. Inhale and exhale, feeling the stretch across your upper back. Then open your elbows and lift back up to vertical. Repeat on the other side.

MINI CATALOG

If you swim regularly, stay flexible by including these upper body and hand exercises in your stretching routine.



arms open p29
hold for 3 breath cycles



clasped fingers p28
hold for 3 breath cycles



upper back forward stretch p32
hold for 2 breath cycles



twist, arms crossed p33
hold for 2 breath cycles;
repeat on other side

SOCCER

Soccer players need quick reactions and agility. Running, stopping, starting, and kicking the ball involve moving your legs in many different planes, which requires good hip flexibility. These stretches will help prevent groin strains and counteract muscle tightness in the hips that can result from lots of running.

STRETCHING HELPS TO:

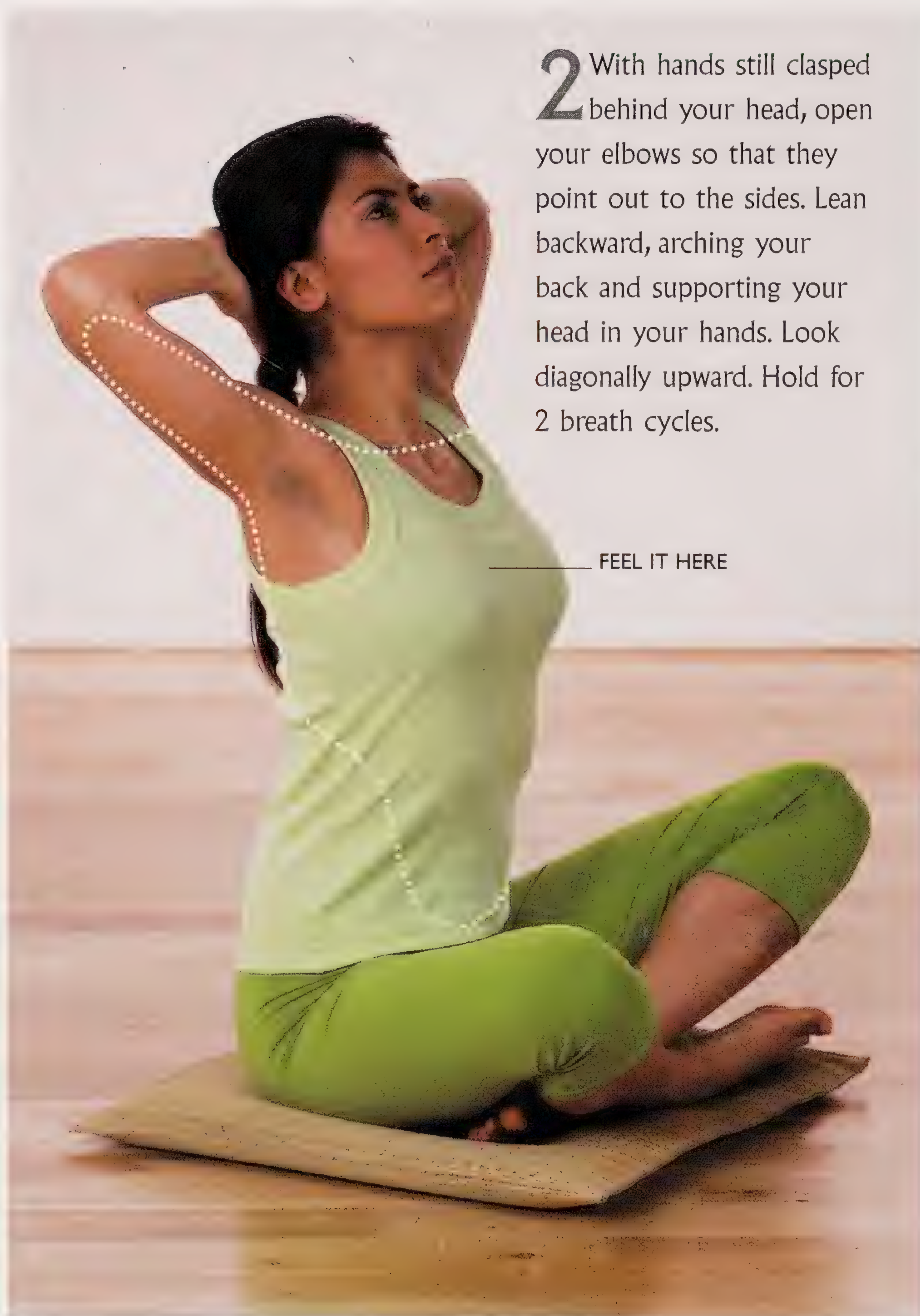
- **make running easier** by releasing tight hip and leg muscles and improving stride length.
- **make quick changes** of direction when running easier by improving back flexibility.

CURVE AND ARCH

The key to this stretch is to press your head back into your hands as you arch back.

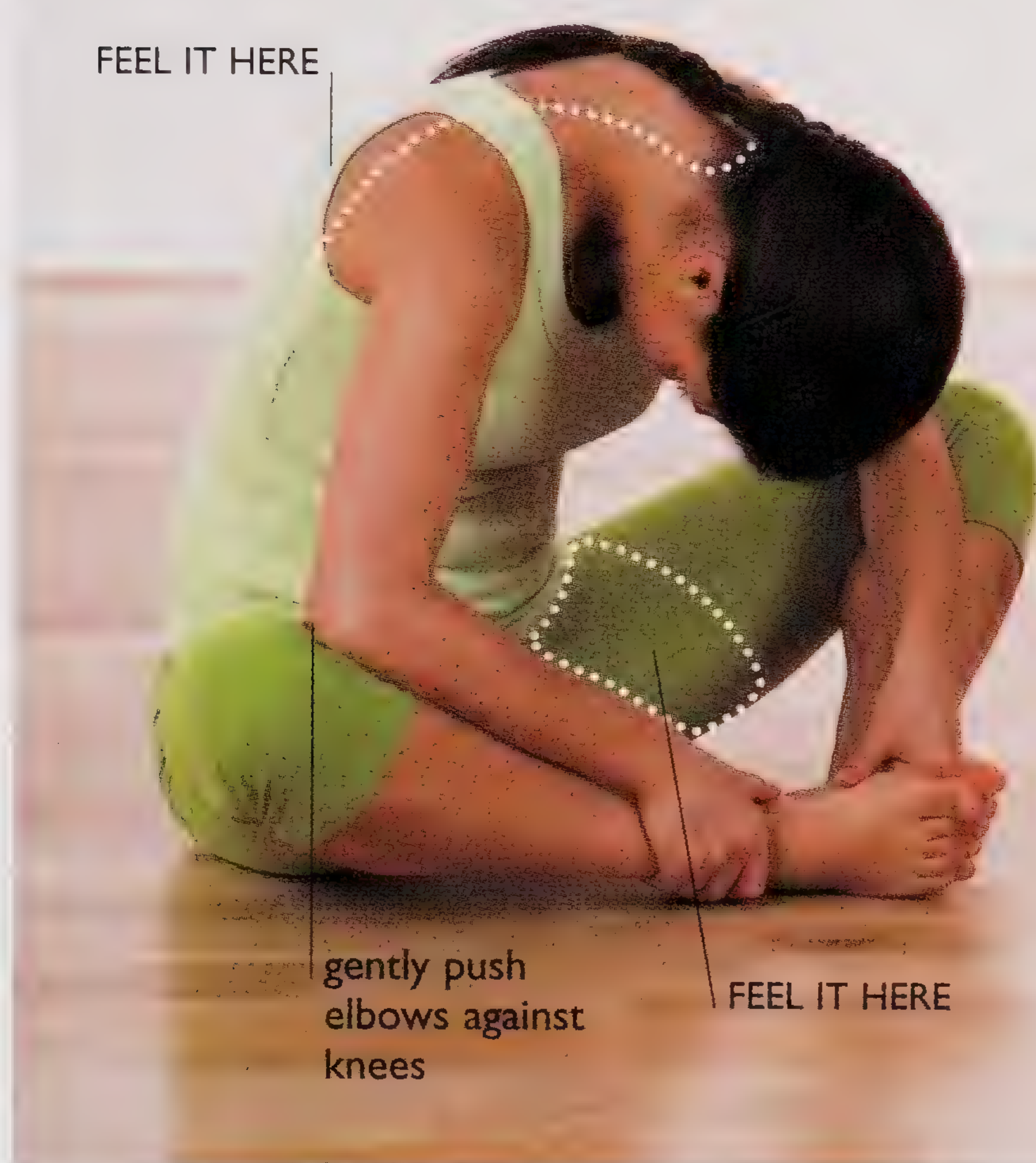


1 Sit up straight with your legs crossed. Lift your head and clasp your hands behind it. Point your elbows forward. Tuck your chin in, and slowly roll your head down until your elbows touch your knees. Inhale and exhale, then slowly roll back up.



2 With hands still clasped behind your head, open your elbows so that they point out to the sides. Lean backward, arching your back and supporting your head in your hands. Look diagonally upward. Hold for 2 breath cycles.

SITTING GROIN STRETCH



Sit on the floor with the soles of your feet together and your knees apart, falling toward the floor. Pull your navel into your spine, and gently hold onto your shins as you pull your head toward your feet. Gently pull your ankles to increase the stretch in the groin, back, and outer hips. Hold for 3–4 breath cycles.

LEANING HURDLER



Avoid this stretch if you have knee problems. Sit on the floor and lean back, supporting yourself with your arms to prevent any strain on the knees. Bend your left leg, bringing your foot toward your bottom. Push your left hip forward and pull your navel into your spine. Lean on your right forearm or hand and feel the stretch in the front of your hip and thigh. Hold for 3–4 breath cycles. Repeat on the other side.

MINI CATALOG

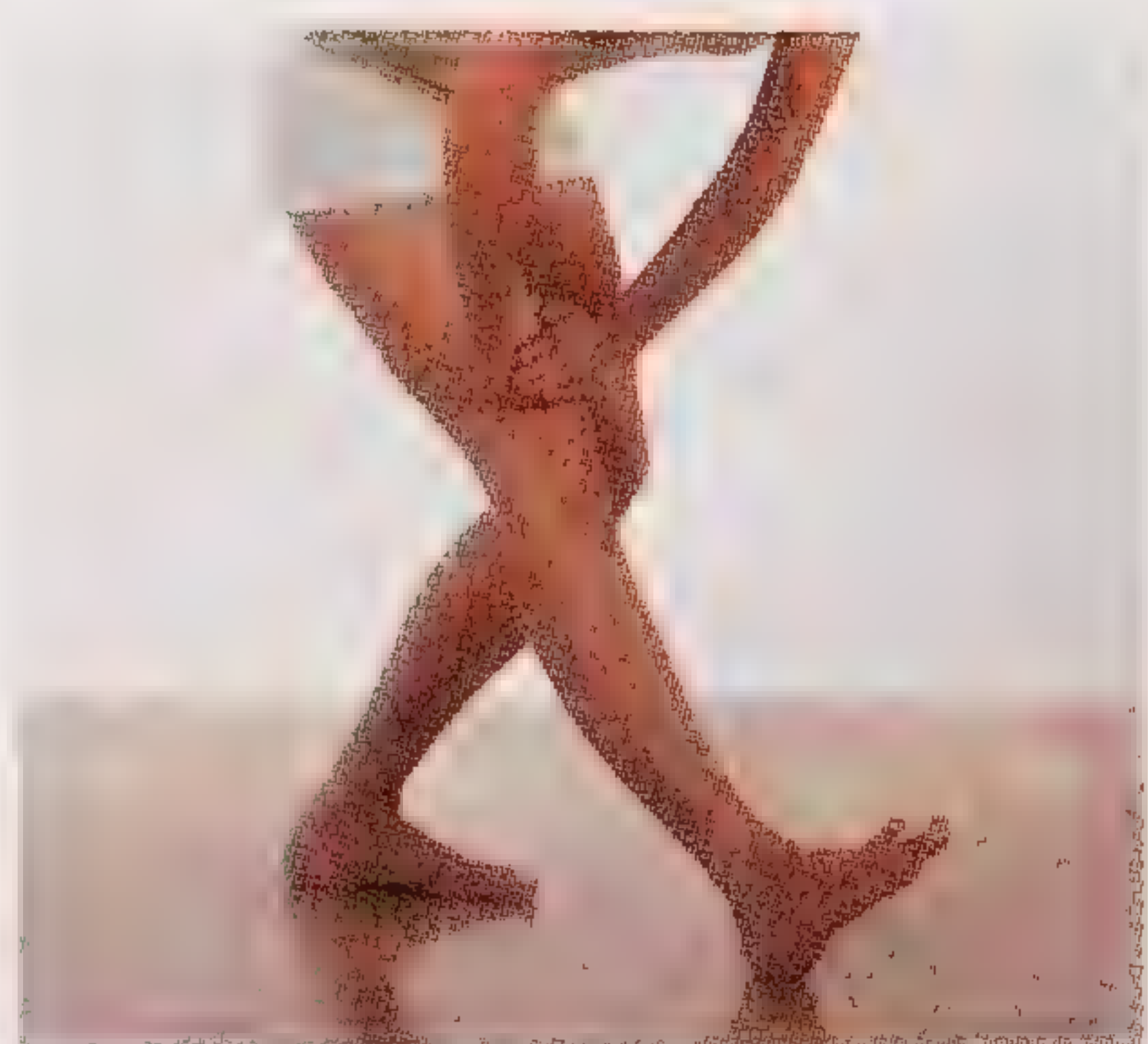
Be sure to include these lower body stretches. The hips, thighs, and calves become tight and fatigued from constant running.



front hip stretch p42
hold for 3 breath cycles;
repeat on other side



side hip stretch p43
hold for 4 breath cycles;
repeat on other side



standing hamstring p46
hold for 3 breath cycles;
repeat on other leg



step drop p49
hold for 4 breath cycles

RUNNING

The nemesis of all runners is IT band friction syndrome, where the tendon that runs down the outside of the thigh becomes inflamed. Another common complaint is the dreaded piriformis syndrome, where the sciatic nerve becomes irritated and causes leg pain. These stretches will help to keep you running pain-free.

STRETCHING HELPS TO:

- **preserve, balance**, and increase stride length, which is necessary for covering long distances.
- **lubricate the joints** and promote smooth hip mechanics, which reduces the risk of injury.

RUNNER'S LUNGE

Stretch your legs and hips to help balance your stride. Ensure that the “headlights” of your hips face forward

equally. Resist the tendency to twist to the right by pressing your right hip down toward the floor.



1 Lunge your left foot forward and bend your knee. Place your hands on the floor on either side of your foot. Keep your back leg straight.

2 Reach straight up with your right arm, and turn your head to look at your hand. Hold for 3–4 breath cycles, reaching through your raised hand, pushing out through your back heel, and stretching your head forward. Repeat on the other side.



INTENSIFY THE STRETCH

Tuck your hips under, and place both hands on your knee. Press down and look diagonally upward. Keep your back leg straight. Feel the increased stretch from your right knee up to your chest.

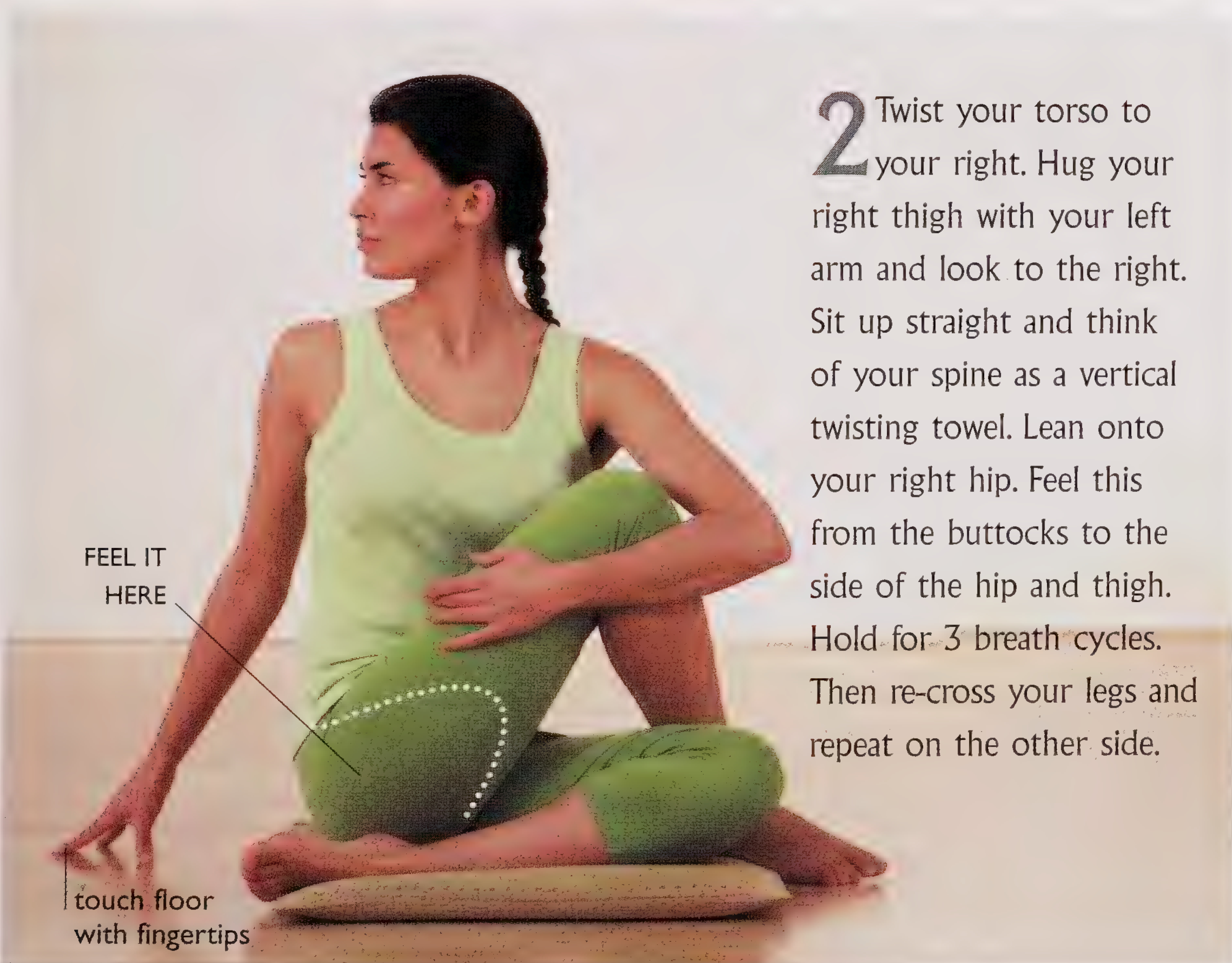


SEATED PIRIFORMIS TWIST

The piriformis muscle is behind the gluteal (buttock) muscle, close to the sciatic nerve. This stretch lengthens the muscles and helps preserve the nerve.



1 Sit and cross your right leg over your left, placing the sole of your right foot flat on the floor. Lift up your chest and tuck your chin in slightly.



2 Twist your torso to your right. Hug your right thigh with your left arm and look to the right. Sit up straight and think of your spine as a vertical twisting towel. Lean onto your right hip. Feel this from the buttocks to the side of the hip and thigh. Hold for 3 breath cycles. Then re-cross your legs and repeat on the other side.

MINI CATALOG

These hip, leg, and foot stretches will have a restorative effect. Ensure that you are ready for your next run!



side hip stretch p43
hold for 4 breath cycles;
repeat on other side



standing quad stretch p44
hold for 3 breath cycles;
repeat on other leg



step drop p49
hold for 4 breath cycles



transverse arch p51
repeat both steps 5 times
on each foot

SKIING

Whether cross-country or downhill, skiing uses the psoas muscles (the deep hip flexors), which run along either side of the spine and into the legs. Failing to stretch these muscles can cause lower back pain. It's also important to stretch the triceps, the muscles at the backs of the upper arms, which you use to handle ski poles.

STRETCHING HELPS TO:

- **improve balance and control** when skiing by developing an even squat stance.
- **encourage good posture** and technique when skiing by helping to align the back.

PSOAS LUNGE

Remember to tuck your pelvis under when performing this stretch. Think of an imaginary tail attached to

your tailbone—tuck your tail between your legs to tilt your pelvis under.



1 Lunge your right leg forward, and place your hands on either side of your right foot. Straighten your back leg, and press your left hip toward the ground.



2 Tuck your hips under; place both hands on your right thigh. Exhale, lift your chest, and look diagonally upward. Inhale, then exhale and look forward.



3 Minding your balance, place your left forearm on your right thigh and slowly reach your right arm behind you. Then reach your left arm out so that both arms are extended. Look back in the direction of the twist and hold for 3 breath cycles. Repeat with your left leg lunged forward.

LEANING TRICEPS STRETCH

Stand with feet about hip-width apart and pelvis tucked under. Cross your arms and hold onto your elbows. Lift upward out of your waist and pull up with your hands as you lean up and over an imaginary fence on your left. Breathe into the stretch on your right side for 2 breath cycles, then return to upright and repeat on the other side.

FEEL IT HERE _____

keep elbows
back

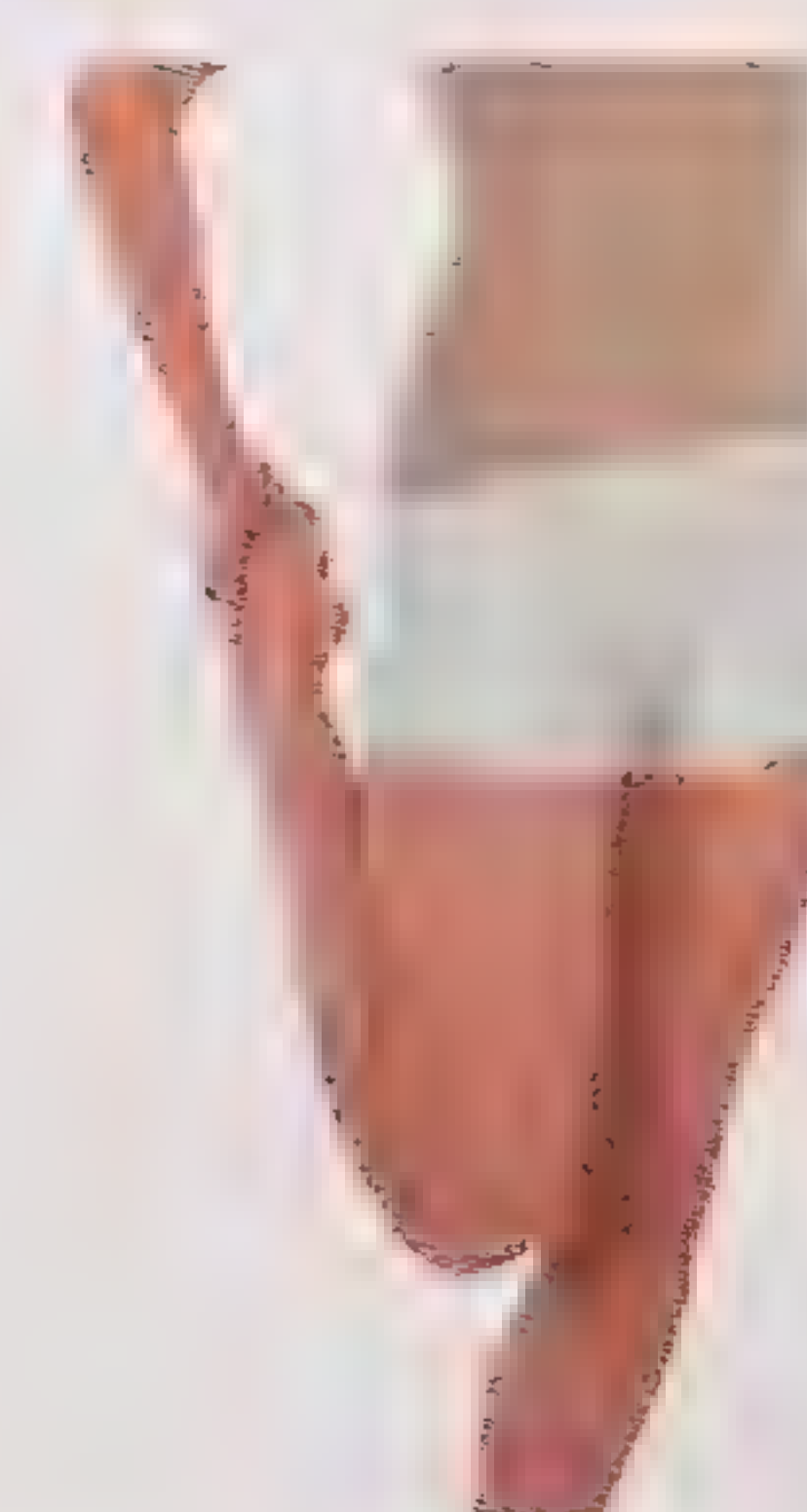
keep back flat
against an
imaginary wall

MINI CATALOG

Skiing requires strong and flexible legs. Improve your stamina on the slopes by performing these simple hip and leg stretches.



side hip stretch p43
hold for 4 breath cycles;
repeat on other side



standing quad stretch p44
hold for 3 breath cycles;
repeat on other leg



inner thigh squat p45
hold for 3 breath cycles



basic lunge p48
hold for 4 breath cycles;
repeat on other leg

CYCLING

Regular cycling can cause tightness in the sides of the hips and the fronts of the thighs, leading to knee and back problems. The typical forward-bent position may cause round shoulders, while tilting the head up to see ahead can pinch the neck nerves. Stretching helps to prevent these problems from being carried into daily life.

STRETCHING HELPS TO:

- **improve flexibility** for easier back and neck positioning over handle bars and frame.
- **restore and rebalance** over-used leg muscles, enabling greater power when cycling.

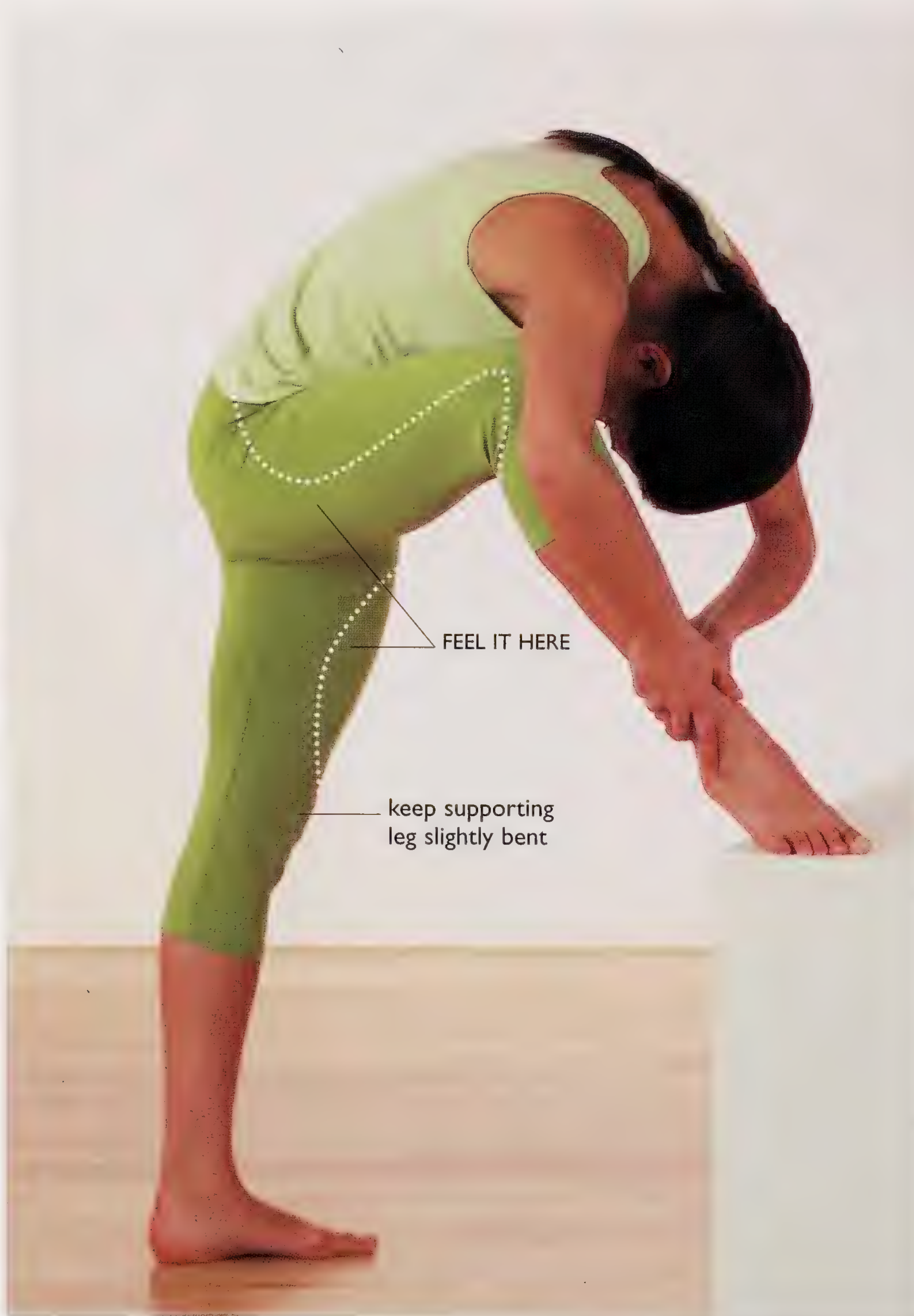
ANKLE-HOLD HIP STRETCH

This stretch targets the sides of the hips and the thighs—typical problem areas for cyclists.

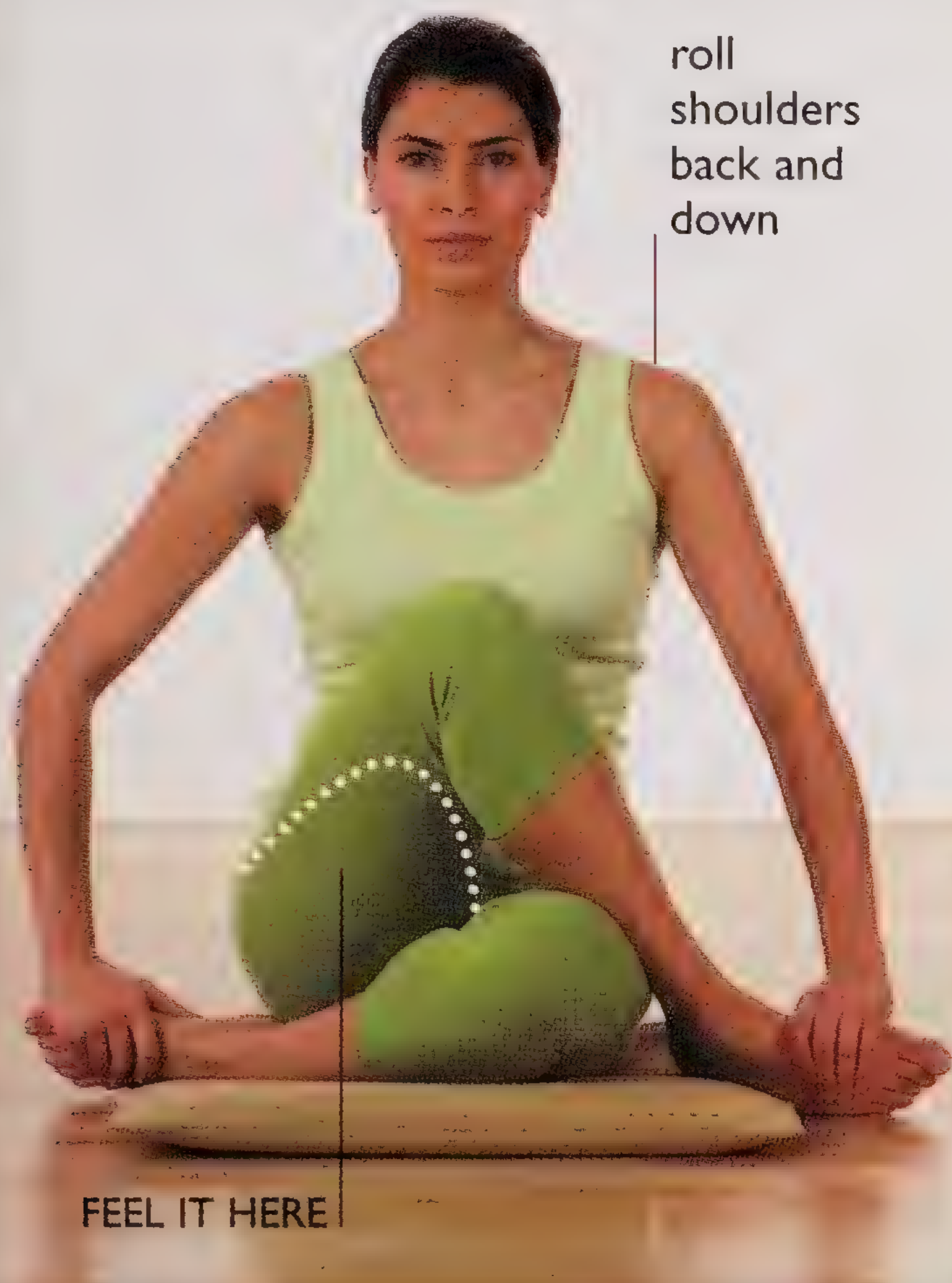


1 Hold your buttocks firm, then raise your right foot and place it on a stable support in front of you with knee bent. Raise your right heel so that just the ball of your foot is on the support.

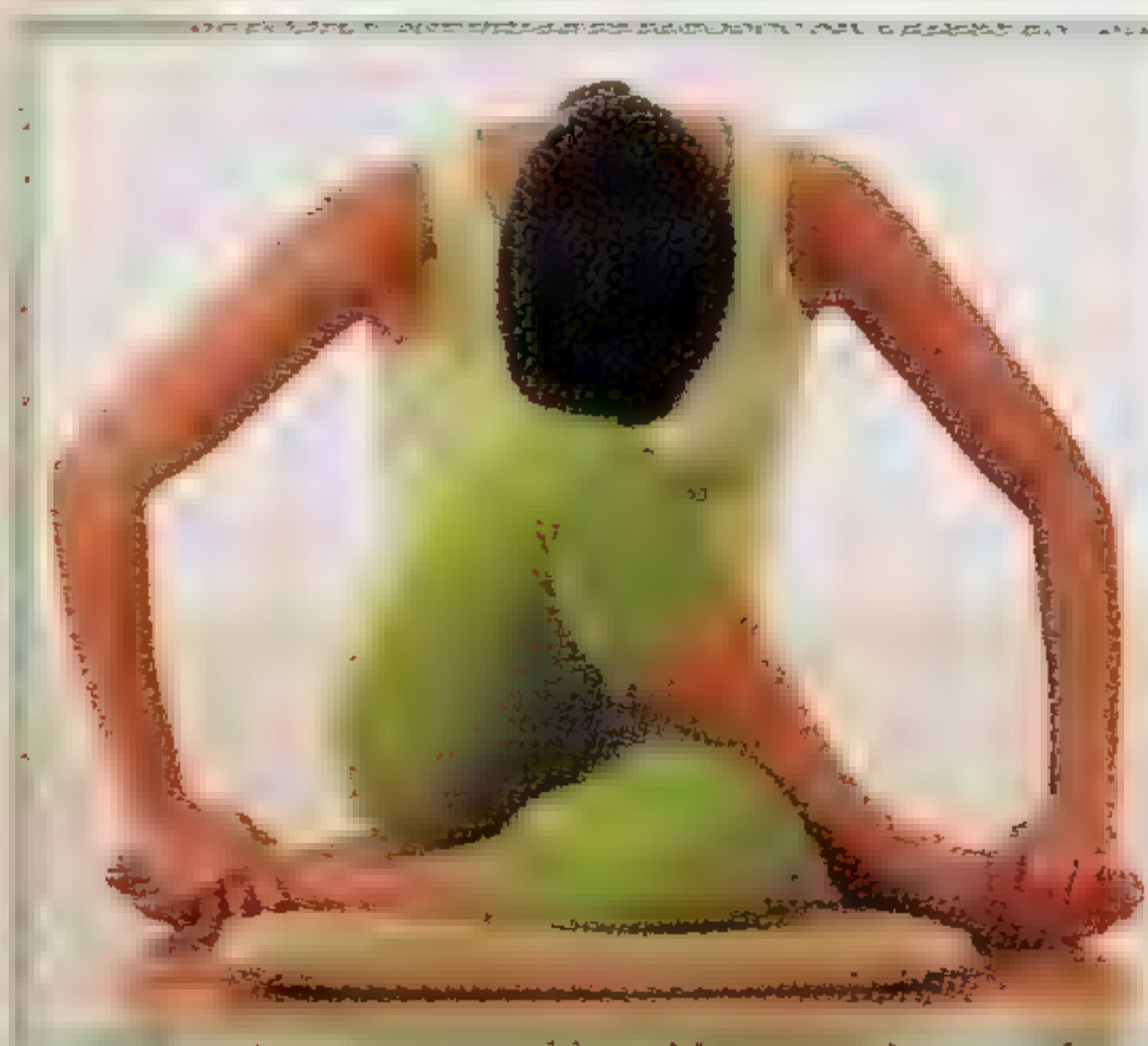
2 Stretch up, pulling your ribs away from your pelvis, and lean forward over your bent leg. Pull your navel into your spine, round your back, and grasp your ankle. Hold for 3 breath cycles, then repeat on the other leg.



SITTING, KNEES CROSSED



Sit on the floor with one leg crossed over the other, knees lined up, if possible. You may find it more comfortable to sit on a cushion or folded towel. Grasp your feet, and pull your navel in toward your spine. Pull your feet in toward you. Feel the stretch in the inner thighs and the sides of the hips. Hold for 3 breath cycles, then repeat with legs crossed the other way.



INTENSIFY THE STRETCH

Hold onto your feet and lean forward as you pull your feet upward. Feel an increased stretch in your thighs, hips, and upper back.

ELBOW GRASP

This is an excellent stretch to open the chest and shoulders. Grasp one arm and then the other. If you can't reach your elbows, hold your forearms.



1 Stand with feet shoulder-width apart, your hips tucked under. Roll your shoulders up and back, pulling your shoulder blades together. Reach back and grasp your left arm above the elbow.



2 Then reach back and cup your right elbow in your left hand. Lift your chest, feeling the stretch there, and hold for 3 breath cycles. Re-cross your arms and repeat the stretch.

MINI CATALOG

These stretches will help to open the chest and stretch the waist. The leg stretches will combat tightness in the thighs.



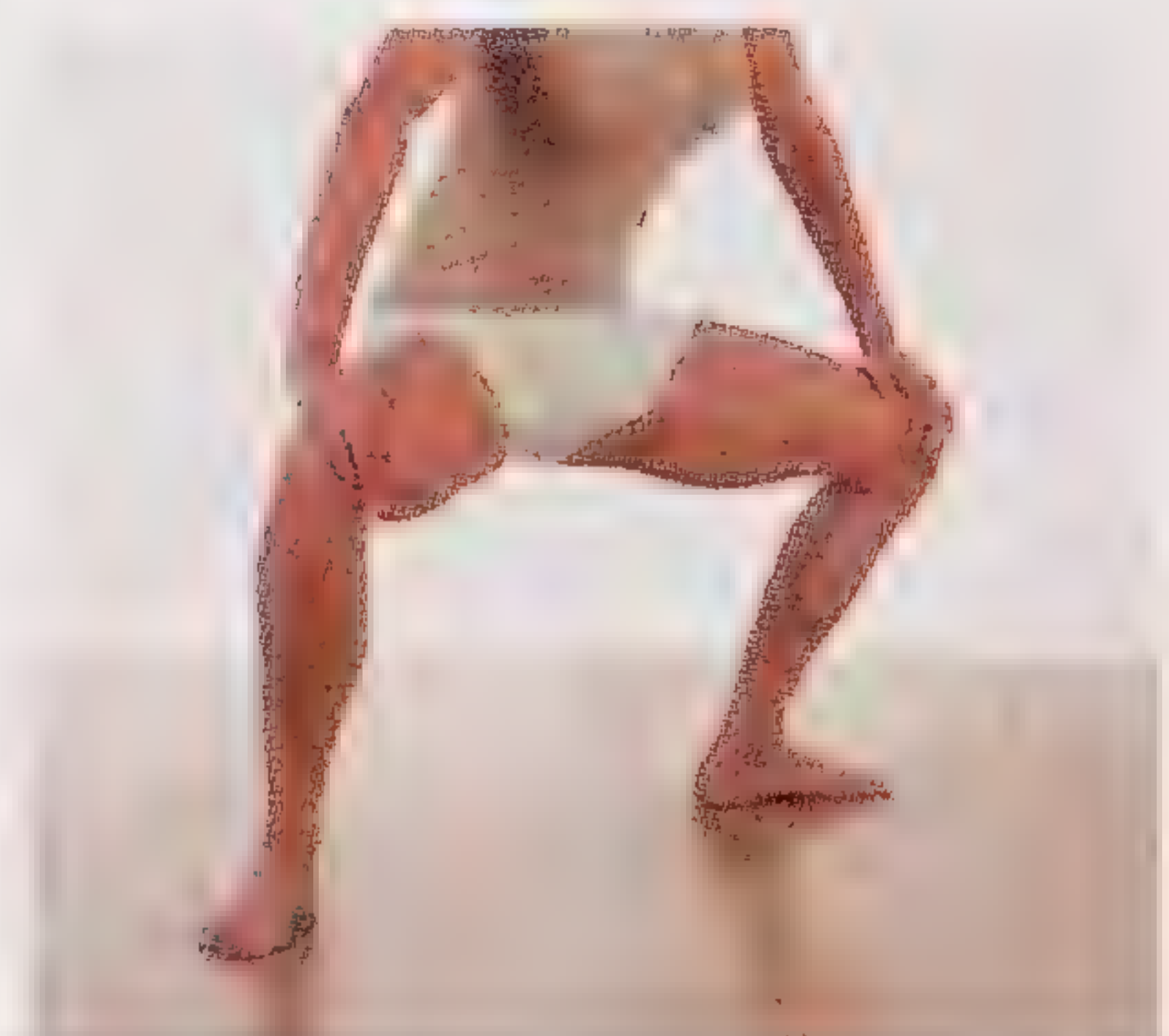
corner chest stretch p30
hold for 4 breath cycles



standing waist twist p40
hold for 2 breath cycles;
repeat on other side



standing quad stretch p44
hold for 3 breath cycles;
repeat on other leg



inner thigh squat p45
hold for 3 breath cycles

HIKING

An excellent sport for experiencing nature, hiking strengthens the lower back. The downside is that walking for long distances can cause tightness in the hips and legs. Wearing a backpack when you hike can strain the trapezius muscles between the neck and shoulders, since they tense to push up against the extra weight.

STRETCHING HELPS TO:

- **increase stamina** for distance hiking by relaxing overused muscles in the hips and legs.
- **lessen soreness** and restore muscle length, increasing the overall enjoyment of hiking.

BOWED-HEAD KNEE HUG

Keep this stretch focused in the buttocks and back of the thigh by pressing your hips downward as you lift

your knee. Pulling your knee up toward the opposite shoulder in the second step intensifies this stretch.



1 Balance on one leg while you pull your other knee toward your chest. Tuck your hips under and bow your head toward your knee for 3 breath cycles.

2 Look forward, then hug your raised knee toward the opposite shoulder. Bow your head again, and hold for 3 breath cycles. Repeat with the other leg.

HAND-ON-HEAD NECK STRETCH

This stretches the upper trapezius, which is responsible for elevating the shoulders, tilting the head to the same side, and rotating the chin toward the ceiling.



1 Place your left hand on your left shoulder and your right hand on your head, just above your left ear. Gently allow your right arm weight to pull your head toward your right shoulder.

2 Maintaining the gentle stretch in the left side of your neck, slowly turn your chin toward your left shoulder. Hold for 3 breath cycles, then repeat on the other side.

FRONT OF SHIN STRETCH



Cross your left leg in front of your right and point your left foot, placing it top-side down on the floor. Gently bend your right leg so that it presses down on your left calf. Feel the stretch in the front of your left shin and down into the front of the foot. Hold for 3 breath cycles. Repeat on the other foot.

MINI CATALOG

These stretches target the hips and thighs, which are in constant use when hiking. Be sure to stop for regular stretching breaks.



front hip stretch p42
hold for 3 breath cycles;
repeat on other side



side hip stretch p43
hold for 4 breath cycles;
repeat on other side



inner thigh squat p45
hold for 3 breath cycles



standing quad stretch p44
hold for 3 breath cycles;
repeat on other leg

DANCING

A typical dance session may involve demanding footwork as well as some arm endurance from holding and changing arm positions. Dancers often develop problems with the IT bands—the tendons that run down the outsides of the thighs. When they become tight they can cause lower back soreness and aching legs.

STRETCHING HELPS TO:

- **make you lighter** on your feet by improving hip mobility and weight-shifting ability.
- **improve smoothness**, grace, and poise by enabling greater freedom of movement.

SEATED FIGURE 4

Feel this IT band stretch by lifting the ankle upward as you press the knee downward. There should be no pain in your knees. If you can't bring your ankle to your knee, cross your legs as comfortably as possible.



1 Sit slightly forward on a chair. Cross your right leg over your left, slip your left hand under your crossed ankle, and place your right hand on your knee. Lean forward from your hips as you gently pull your left ankle and bow your head down. Hold for 3 breath cycles.



2 Slowly move your head and upper body to the right so that you are looking at your knee. Keep your abdominals firm. Feel the stretch in the side of your right hip and hold for 3 breath cycles.



3 Then slowly move your head and upper body to the left so that you are looking at your foot. Feel the stretch at the bottom of your right hip. Hold for 3 breath cycles. Re-cross your legs and repeat the sequence of stretches on the other side.

STANDING HAND CLASP

1 Stand with your feet about shoulder-width apart, and tuck your pelvis under. Lift your kneecaps to straighten your legs and ensure that you don't press back into your knees. Clasp your hands behind your back.



2 Roll your shoulders back, then lift your hands behind you. Pull your navel into your spine as you lean forward. Squeeze your upper arms together as you raise your hands to a comfortable position. Feel a good stretch in your legs but also in your arms and shoulders. Hold for 3 breath cycles.

STANDING WIND-UP

Stand with feet shoulder-width apart. Reach your arms around to the right, placing your hands on your hips. Wind yourself up tightly as you turn your head and look around to the right. Feel a good stretch in your back and some stretch in your shoulders and waist. Hold for 3 breath cycles; repeat on the other side.



MINI CATALOG

Be sure to perform these simple hip and leg stretches before and after any recreational dance session.



front hip stretch p42
hold for 3 breath cycles;
repeat on other side



side hip stretch p43
hold for 4 breath cycles;
repeat on other side



standing quad stretch p44
hold for 3 breath cycles
repeat on other leg



basic lunge p48
hold for 4 breath cycles;
repeat on other leg



STRETCHES FOR DAILY ACTIVITIES

Considering the demands we place on our overworked bodies, they serve us remarkably well. It is easy to forget how mundane, day-to-day tasks such as working at a computer, driving, and talking on the telephone all take a physical toll on the body.

Here I present essential stretches to get you through your day.

Whether you garden, sit at a computer, or spend long periods on your feet, there are stretches here for you. A well-chosen stretch can ease muscle aches and pains and keep you feeling energized throughout the day. Think of stretching as a way of rewarding your body for its unfailing good service to you.

GARDENING

Gardening and yard work are not as mundane as one might think. Reaching and leaning can mean that the back holds many different awkward positions. Pruning works the muscles in the forearms and hands. Kneeling and repeated bending of the knees can irritate the IT bands, the tendons that run from the hips to the shins.

STRETCHING HELPS TO:

- **restore** the natural curve of the lower back and prevent pain caused by leaning over.
- **increase circulation** to the knees by improving the flexibility of the hips.

LOWER BACK FIST PRESS

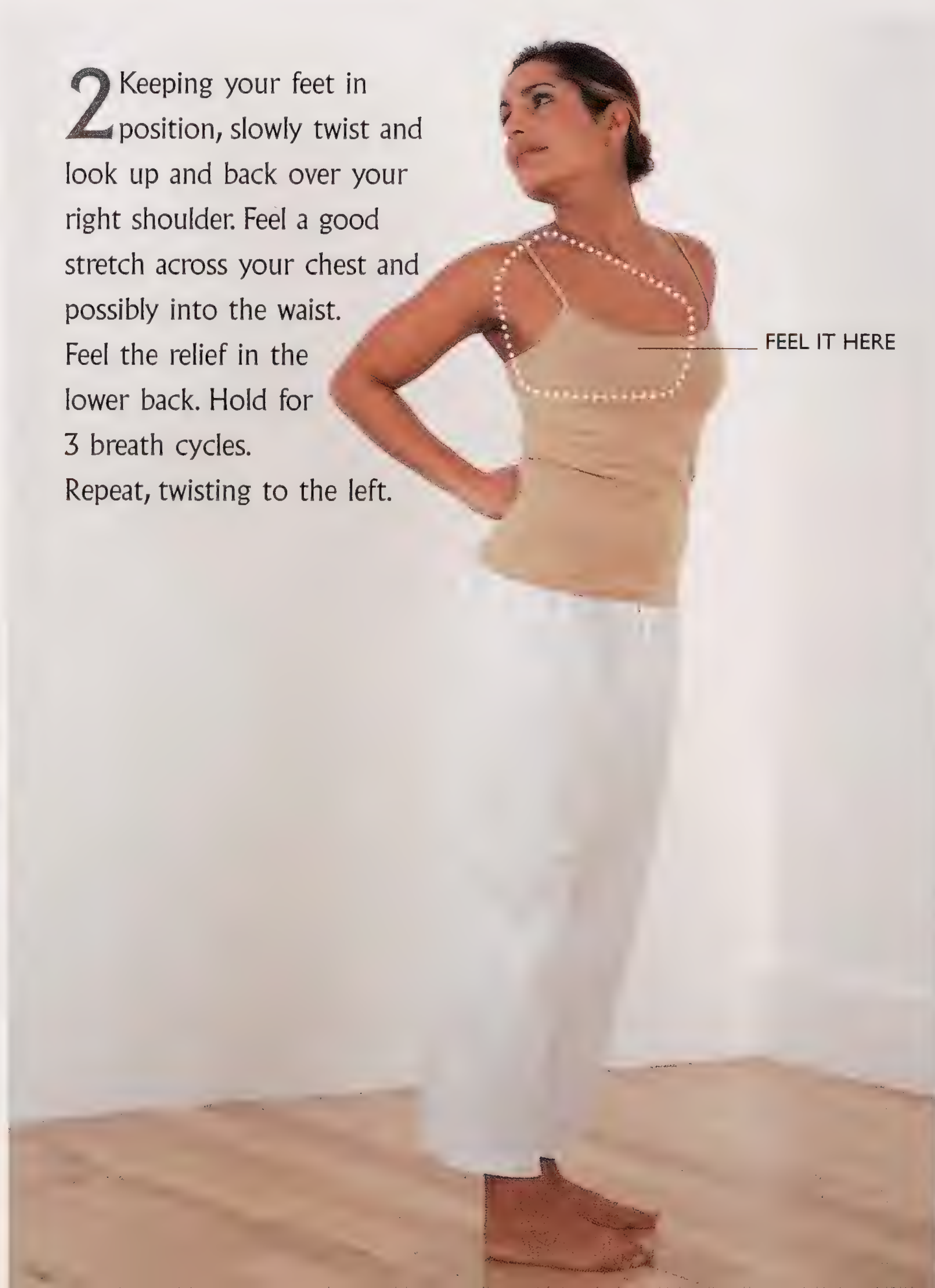
This stretch is essential for gardeners, since it realigns the discs in the lower back, which helps to relieve

strain on them. Focus the effect by tightening your abdominals and lifting your groin.



1 Stand with your feet hip-width apart. Make two fists with your hands and press them firmly into your lower back as you tighten your abdominals.

2 Keeping your feet in position, slowly twist and look up and back over your right shoulder. Feel a good stretch across your chest and possibly into the waist. Feel the relief in the lower back. Hold for 3 breath cycles. Repeat, twisting to the left.



WRIST CIRCLES



Hold your arms still as you circle both hands at the wrists. Circle 10 times in each direction.

KNEE CIRCLES



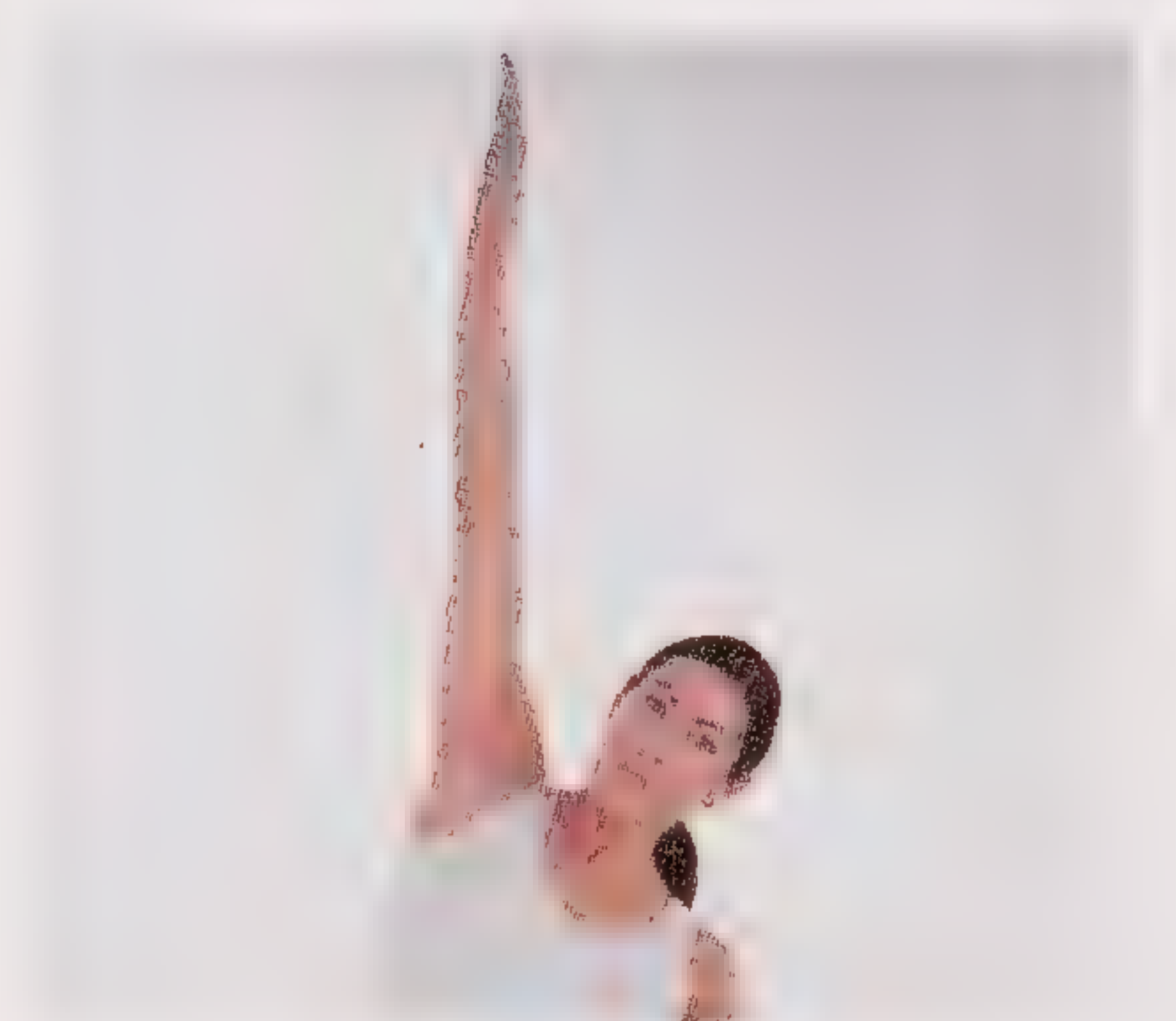
Pull your navel into your spine. Reach down and place one hand on each knee. Allow your knees to support some of your upper body weight. Keep your back as straight as you can by leaning over from the hips. Gently circle your knees. Breathe easily as you circle 6 times in each direction.

MINI CATALOG

Perform these stretches to help protect your back and legs. You could also add the hand exercises on page 107.



arms open p29
hold for 3 breath cycles



standing side stretch p31
hold for 4 breath cycles
repeat on other side



inner thigh squat p45
hold for 3 breath cycles



side hip stretch p43
hold for 4 breath cycles
repeat on other side

COMPUTER USE

The arteries that supply oxygen to the nerves in our neck and shoulders run through a narrow space between the collar bone and first rib. Tensing up to focus forward on our work compresses this area, causing tired muscles as well as nerve and tendon irritation. Do at least two of these stretches every half an hour.

STRETCHING HELPS TO:

- **prevent nerve damage** from repetitive mouse and keyboard use.
- **relieve tension build-up** in the shoulders, back, and arms.
- **prevent eye strain** and headaches by refreshing the eyes.

CHAIR TILT

Sit slightly forward on a chair, your feet firmly planted on the floor. Reach your hands back and hold onto the back of your seat. If you can, lean back and use the chair back to brace you. Look diagonally upward and open your chest. Hold for 3 breath cycles, then relax.





MEDIAN NERVE STRETCH

Raise your right arm to just below shoulder height at your side, and turn your palm to face away from you. Point your fingers back as you tilt your head away from your arm. Hold for 3 breath cycles, then relax. Do this 3 more times, then repeat on the other side. The median nerve runs along the arm from the neck and controls the intricate movements of the hand and fingers.

ULNAR NERVE STRETCH



Raise your right hand and rest it against your right cheek with fingers pointing downward. Tilt your left ear toward your left shoulder. Hold for 3 breath cycles, then relax. Do this 3 more times, then repeat on the other side. This stretch will help to keep your grip strong.

RADIAL NERVE STRETCH



Make a fist and bend it inward toward the forearm. Then straighten your elbow and lift your hand behind you. Hold for 2 breath cycles, then relax. Do this 3 more times, then repeat on the other hand. Although you feel it in the forearm, it eases the entire radial nerve to the hand.

SEATED COBRA

A great upper back relaxer, this reverses the forward-slumping posture of rounded shoulders. Be sure to lengthen the back of your neck and reach out through the top of your head rather than just cocking it back in step 2.



1 Sit toward the back of a chair and plant your feet firmly on the floor. Lean forward and clasp your hands behind your neck.

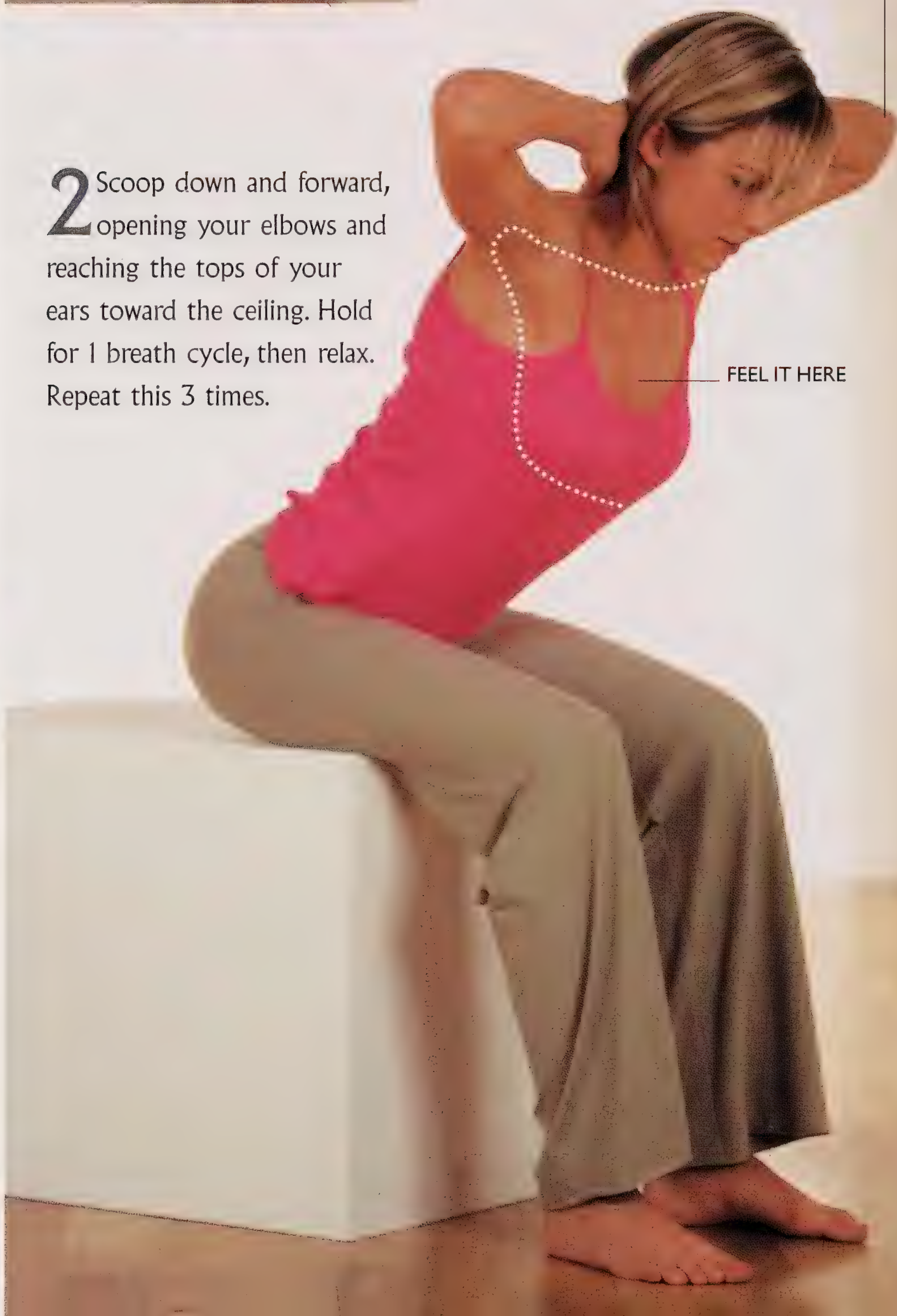
pull elbows
back

2 Scoop down and forward, opening your elbows and reaching the tops of your ears toward the ceiling. Hold for 1 breath cycle, then relax. Repeat this 3 times.

EAR PULL



Diffuse tension by pinching the hard cartilage in each of your ears and gently pulling upward. Hold for 2 breath cycles, then release and repeat again. Try yawning as you breathe to help release tight jaw muscles that can contribute to headache pain.



FEEL IT HERE

CLASPED HAND ROTATIONS



Tuck your right elbow into your body. Interlace your fingers, and use your left hand to help you to make circles with your right wrist. Circle 10 times in each direction. Repeat with the other hand.

CLASPED HAND CIRCLES



Sit up straight, with head up and feet firmly planted on the floor. Interlace your fingers and make vertical circling motions with your hands, moving up, in toward yourself, down, then forward 5 times. Then change direction and repeat 5 times. Consciously inhale and exhale throughout.

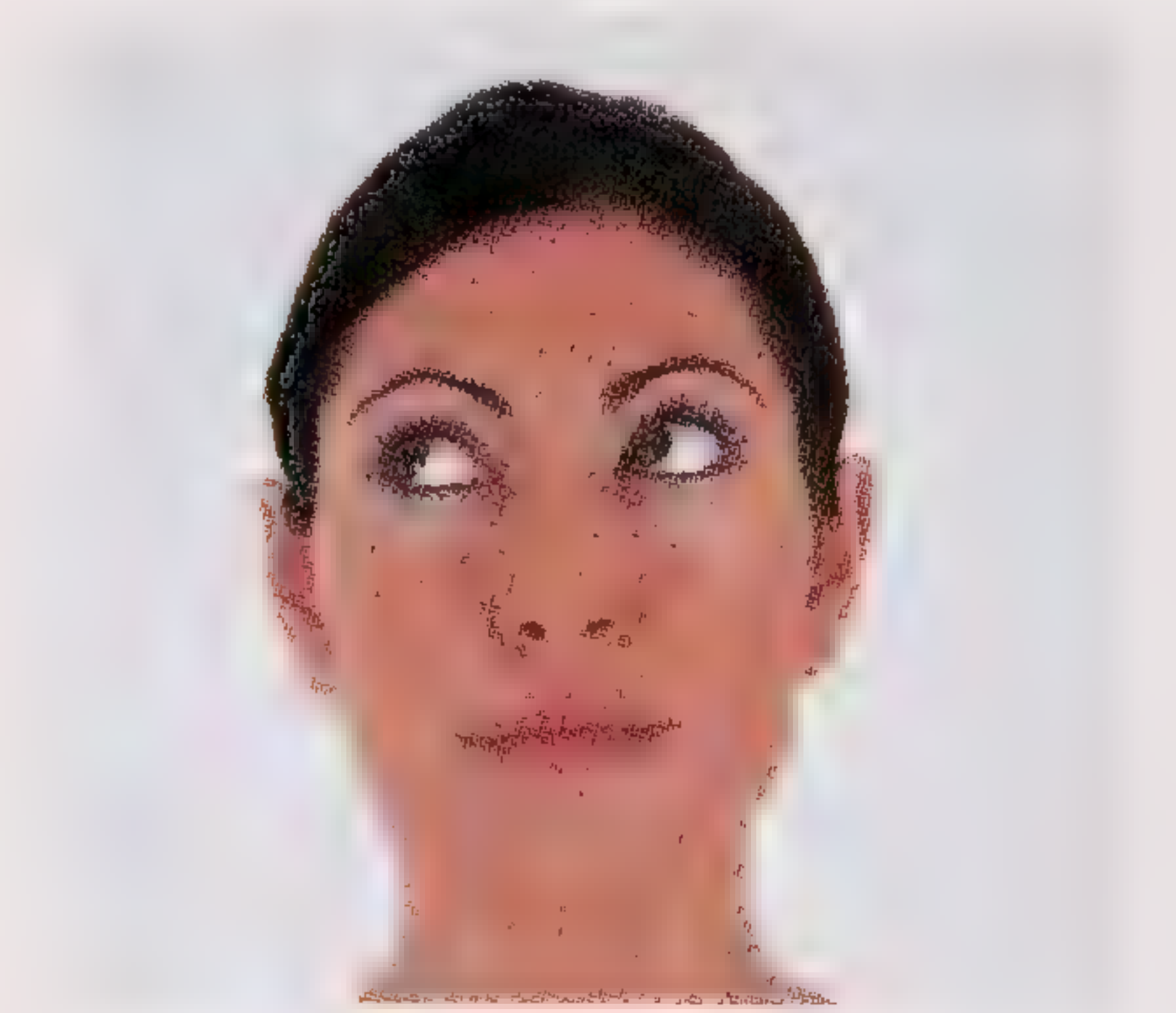
FORCEFUL EXHALATION



Sit comfortably with one hand on your chest, the other on your stomach. Slowly but forcefully exhale through your open mouth for a count of 15 seconds. Feel as if you are wringing out a wet cloth with your chest. Breathe normally for 2 breath cycles, then repeat the forceful exhalation once more. This is extremely effective for relieving tense shoulders—it activates the diaphragm so strongly that it causes the upper shoulders and base of the neck to relax.

MINI CATALOG

Your eyes and neck need regular stretching when working at a computer for long periods—so do your waist, ribs, and legs.



eye stretches p23
repeat sequence once



neck stretch p24
hold for 2 breath cycles;
repeat on other side



standing side stretch p31
hold for 4 breath cycles;
repeat on other side



standing quad stretch p44
hold for 3 breath cycles;
repeat on other leg

LONG DRIVES

Driving for long periods can be hard on the body. The seats tend to round the lower back out of its natural arch, which strains the muscles. Working the pedals tightens the legs, while gripping the wheel and focusing forward create tension in the neck, shoulders, and upper back. Try to take a stretching break every 90 minutes.

STRETCHING HELPS TO:

- **preserve back health**—car seats encourage slumped sitting, which can strain muscles and endanger discs.
- **lengthen leg muscles** and help to prevent chronic knee pain.

GLUTEAL STRETCH



With the car door open, reach your right foot up onto the running board; bend both knees slightly. Lean forward and hold onto either your leg or the car to brace yourself. Gently push back into the right side of your pelvis. Hold for 3 breath cycles. Repeat with the other leg.

DRIVER'S HAMSTRING STRETCH



With the car door open, reach your right foot up onto the running board and pull your toes upward. Place both hands on your right thigh. Keep your leg as straight as possible as you lean forward over it. Hold for 3 breath cycles, then repeat with the other leg.

HIP SWAY



Stand with feet hip-width apart, your hands on your hips. Gently tuck your pelvis under and use your left hand to push your hips to the right. Be sure not to lean back. Hold for 3 breath cycles, then repeat, pushing your hips to the left.

BACKWARD PRAYER



Stand straight and roll your shoulders up and back. Reach your hands behind you and assume a prayer position in the small of your back. Hold for 3 breath cycles.

STANDING
BACK STRETCH

Stand up straight. Place your hands, fingers pointing down, on your lower back. Pull your navel into your spine as you press your hands forward. Tuck your chin into your chest, but also lift your ribcage upward. Hold for 3 breath cycles.





CALF STRETCH

Place the ball of your right foot on the running board and let your heel drop down as you lean forward into your foot. Place both hands on your knee and press downward to increase the stretch. Hold for 3 breath cycles. Repeat on the other leg.

IT BAND STRETCH

Hold onto the car for balance with your right hand, and place your left hand on your hip. Cross your right foot over your left knee. Pull your navel in and lean forward from your hips, keeping your back flat to concentrate the stretch in your right hip and side of thigh. Hold for 3 breath cycles, then repeat on the other side.



TWIST PUNCH



Stand up tall with feet shoulder-width apart. Make two fists. Punch forward with your left fist as you pull back with your right elbow and look behind you. Then reverse it, punching your right fist forward. Repeat each left/right set 6 times. Perform this slowly to stretch under the shoulders and more quickly to invigorate.

HUG WITH HEAD BOW



Either stand or sit. Cross your hands and tightly hug your shoulders. Round over, making your chest concave, and bow your head. Pull your chin in toward your chest. Feel the space between your shoulder blades open and hold for 4 breath cycles.

MINI CATALOG

Stuck at the lights or in a sea of traffic? Diffuse tension by performing these simple stretches while in your seat.



upper back forward stretch p32
hold for 2 breath cycles



neck stretch p24
hold for 2 breath cycles;
repeat on other side



roll-down stretch p25
hold for 2 breath cycles



seated head turn p25
hold for 2 breath cycles;
repeat on other side

FLIGHTS

Flights pose similar problems for the body to long drives—in both cases you are confined to a small seat with limited leg room. Two additional problems on a plane are the physical vibrations, which are associated with back problems, and dehydration, which parches the body's tissues. Perform these stretches every hour, if possible.

STRETCHING HELPS TO:

- **increase circulation**, which may prevent blood clots in the legs from cabin pressure.
- **relieve neck and shoulder** stiffness and pain that may result from sitting in ill-fitting seats.

SEATED REACH-UP

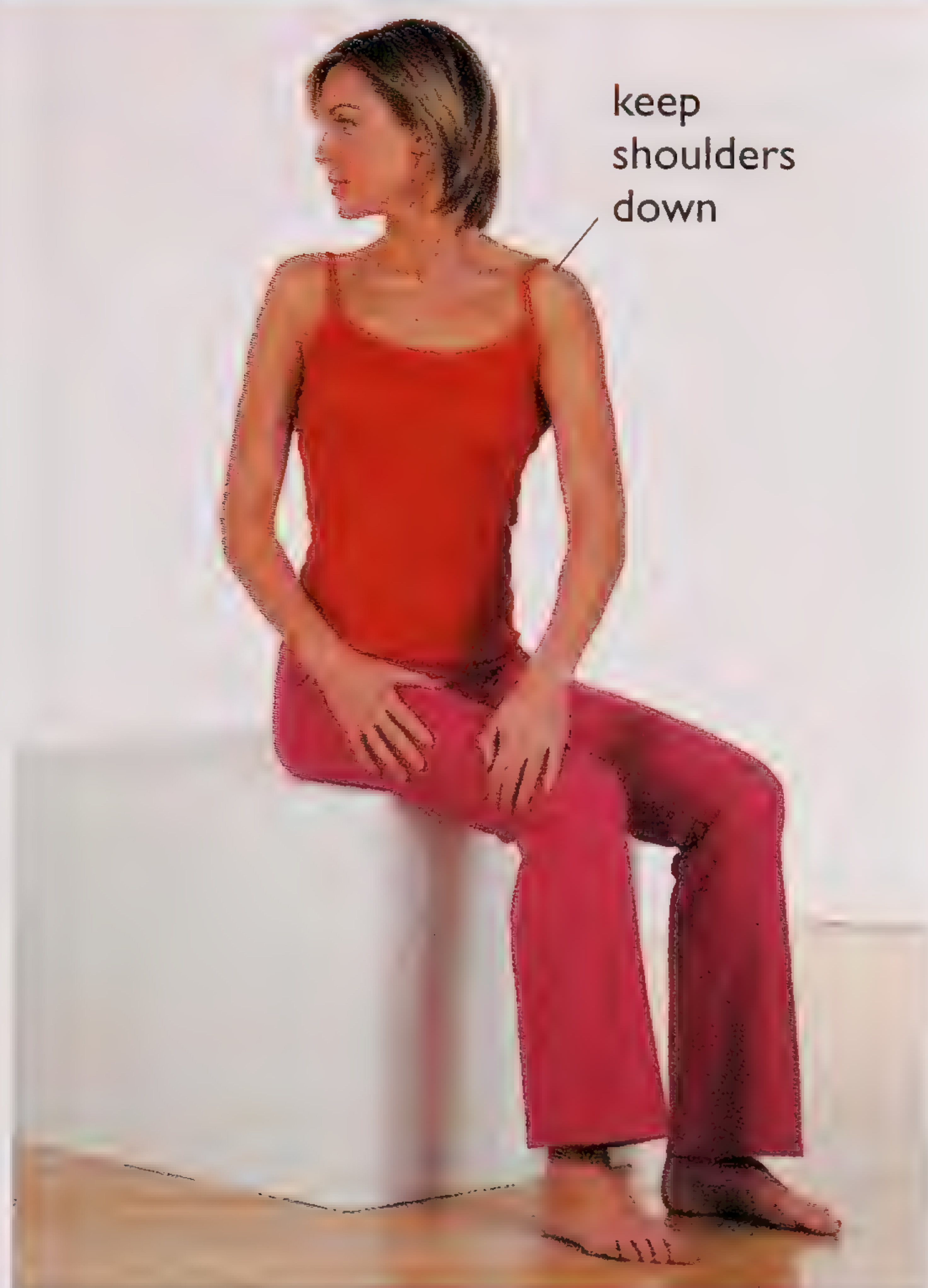
You may have limited leg room, but the space above you is usually available. Take advantage of it by performing this upper body and arm stretch.

2 Now reach your hands above your head. Press your palms upward as you squeeze your elbows in toward your ears. Hold for 3 breath cycles, then relax.



1 Clasp your hands in front of you and turn your palms to face outward. Stretch your hands forward. Hold for 3 breath cycles.





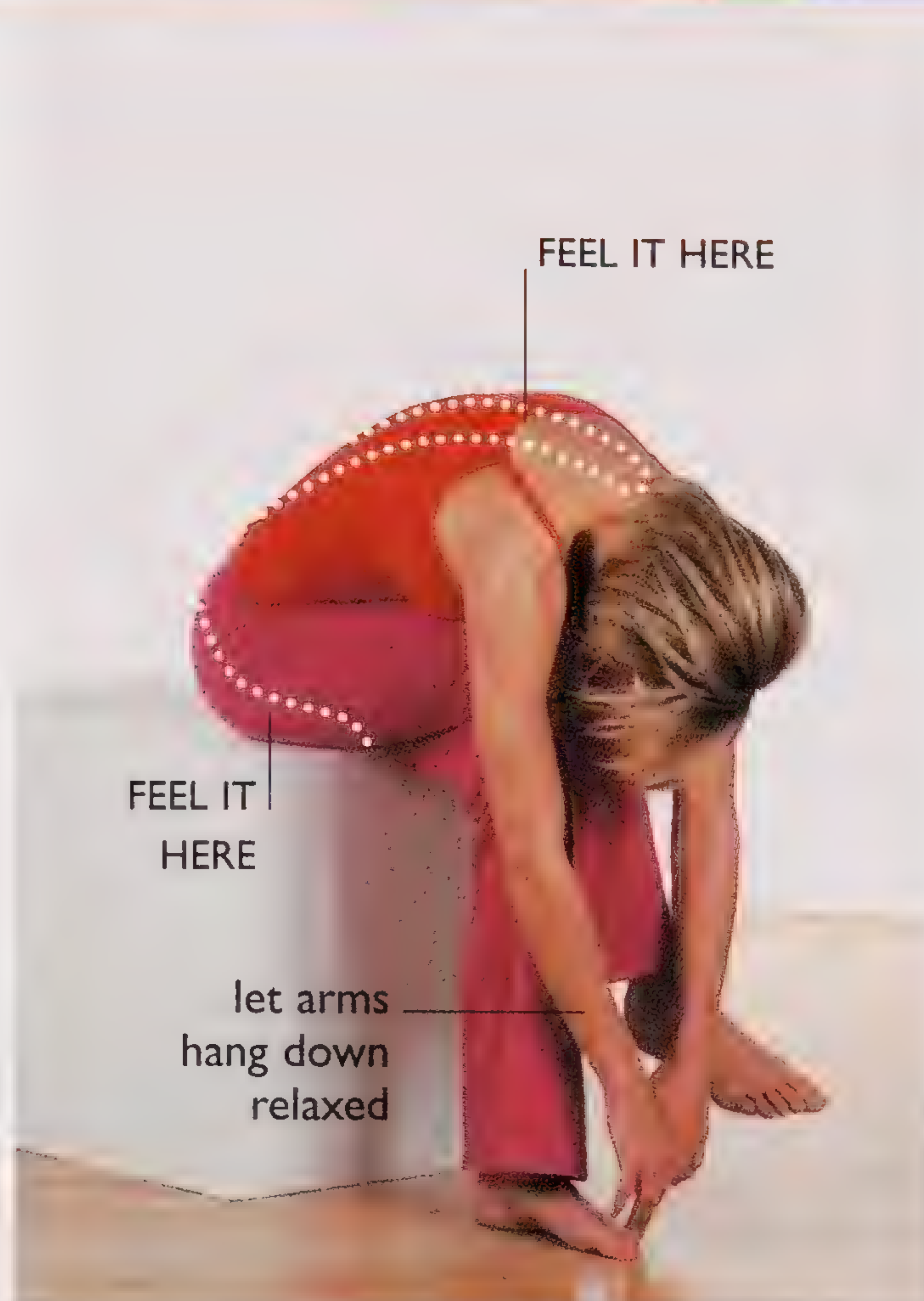
SEATED BACK TWIST

Sit up straight. Place your left hand on the outside of your right thigh, or the arm rest. “Wind up” your spine, using your abdominal and back muscles. Look around to your right and hold for 2 breath cycles. Release; repeat on the other side.

FOOT CIRCLES



Ensure that you have sufficient room to move your feet. Slowly circle one foot so that you feel the stretch up into your ankles and calves. Circle 10 times in each direction. Repeat with the other foot.



CROSS-LEGGED HANG

Sit and cross one leg over the other. Lean forward, letting your head fall toward the floor. Feel the stretch in your back and spine, and hold for 2 breath cycles. Roll up, then repeat with legs crossed the other way.

PENDULUM HEAD



Tuck your chin in toward your chest and point your nose toward the floor. Slowly move your chin from side to side against your chest. Feel the stretch in the back of your neck. Repeat 6 times.

MINI CATALOG

These standing stretches target the legs, waist, and feet. Perform them before boarding the plane, or in the aisle during the flight.



standing quad stretch p44
hold for 3 breath cycles;
repeat on other leg



standing hamstring p46
hold for 3 breath cycles;
repeat on other leg



standing waist twist p40
hold for 2 breath cycles;
repeat on other side



front hip stretch p42
hold for 3 breath cycles;
repeat on other side

LONG WALKS

Protect your stride and your feet with these stretches. The lunge targets the muscles in the legs and hips, but the soles of the feet and shins need special attention too. An unpleasant yet common complaint, plantar fasciitis, which causes pain in the sole and heel of the foot, can simply be prevented with these stretches.

STRETCHING HELPS TO:

- **prevent leg swelling** and associated feelings of leg heaviness and pain.
- **preserve and improve** a walker's stride length by elongating the leg muscles.

WALKER'S LUNGE

Ensure that your hips face forward to get the full benefit of this stretch. If your hips twist, you'll get an unbalanced stretch.

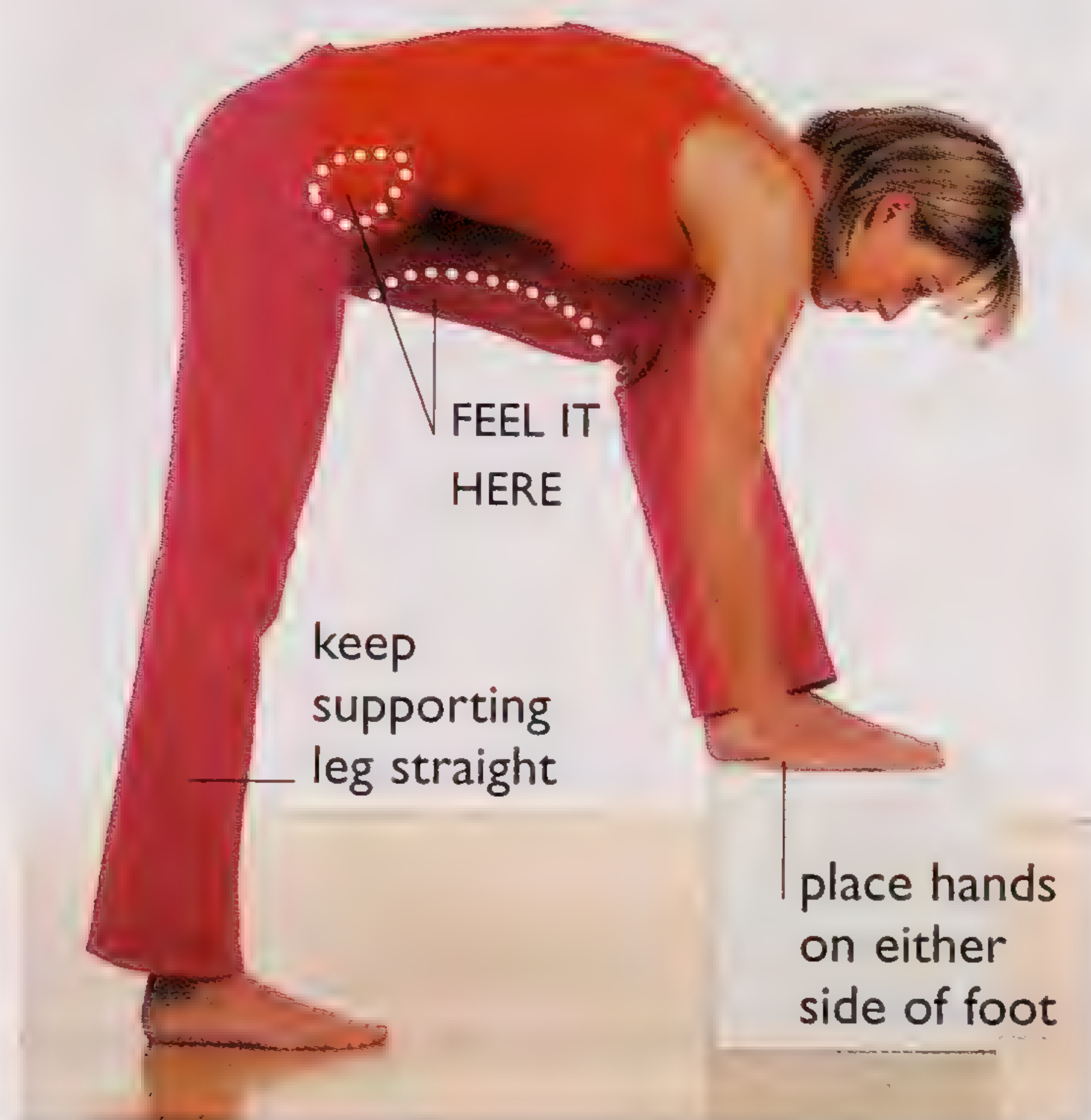


1 Stand up straight, tighten your abdominals, and lift your chest. With hands on hips, step your left leg forward. Keep your hips straight and your back heel down.



2 Tuck your pelvis under so that your hips tilt up slightly; pull your tailbone down. Shift your weight back onto the ball of your back foot. Feel the stretch in the front of your right hip and through the thigh. Hold for 4 breath cycles, then repeat on the other side.

BENT-OVER HIP STRETCH



Stand up straight and tighten your abdominals. Bend your leg and prop your foot up on a raised support such as a step. Tuck your pelvis under and lean over your bent leg. Hold for 4 breath cycles. Repeat on the other leg.

FOOT TWIST



Sit and rest your left foot on your right thigh. Hold the ball of your foot with one hand and the heel with the other. Hold the heel still as you twist the top of the foot one way for 1 breath and the other way for another breath. Repeat, twisting each way 3 times.

BEACH WALK FOOT STRETCH



Beach walking can cause pain in the heels and soles of the feet. Perform this stretch barefoot, before and after a walk. Step one foot back behind you and lift the heel upward so that your toes bend back and your weight is on the ball of your foot. Keeping the heel lifted, press back into your toes until you feel a stretch into the sole of your foot. This should not be painful. Hold for 3 breath cycles, then repeat on the other foot.

MINI CATALOG

Walking on hard city sidewalks can be tiring. These stretches will provide relief for your feet, legs, and back.



transverse arch p51
repeat both steps 5 times on each foot



toe bend p51
hold for 3 breath cycles; repeat on other foot



basic lunge p48
hold for 4 breath cycles; repeat on other leg



seated head curl p36
hold for 2 breath cycles

LONG TELEPHONE CALLS

Telephone use ranks along with computer use as a cause of muscle tension and nerve irritations. The ulnar nerve, which runs from the hand and up through the elbow, may become tight from bending your arm to hold the phone to your ear. Cradling the phone in the crook of your neck can pinch the nerves there.

STRETCHING HELPS TO:

- **counteract** the tendency to round the shoulders forward, which causes pinched nerves and upper back pain.

ELBOW STRETCH

Either sitting or standing, reach your left arm out in front of you with your hand at about hip height and your palm up. Grasp your forearm mid-way between elbow and hand, with your fingers on top and thumb underneath. Then straighten your left arm as you simultaneously press upward with your thumb and downward with your fingers in a twisting motion. Hold for 3 breath cycles, then repeat on the other arm, even if it isn't the one that usually holds the phone.



Hand position: Apply firm pressure with the side of your thumb and your fingers

FEEL IT HERE

turn hand so that palm faces up

press with thumb

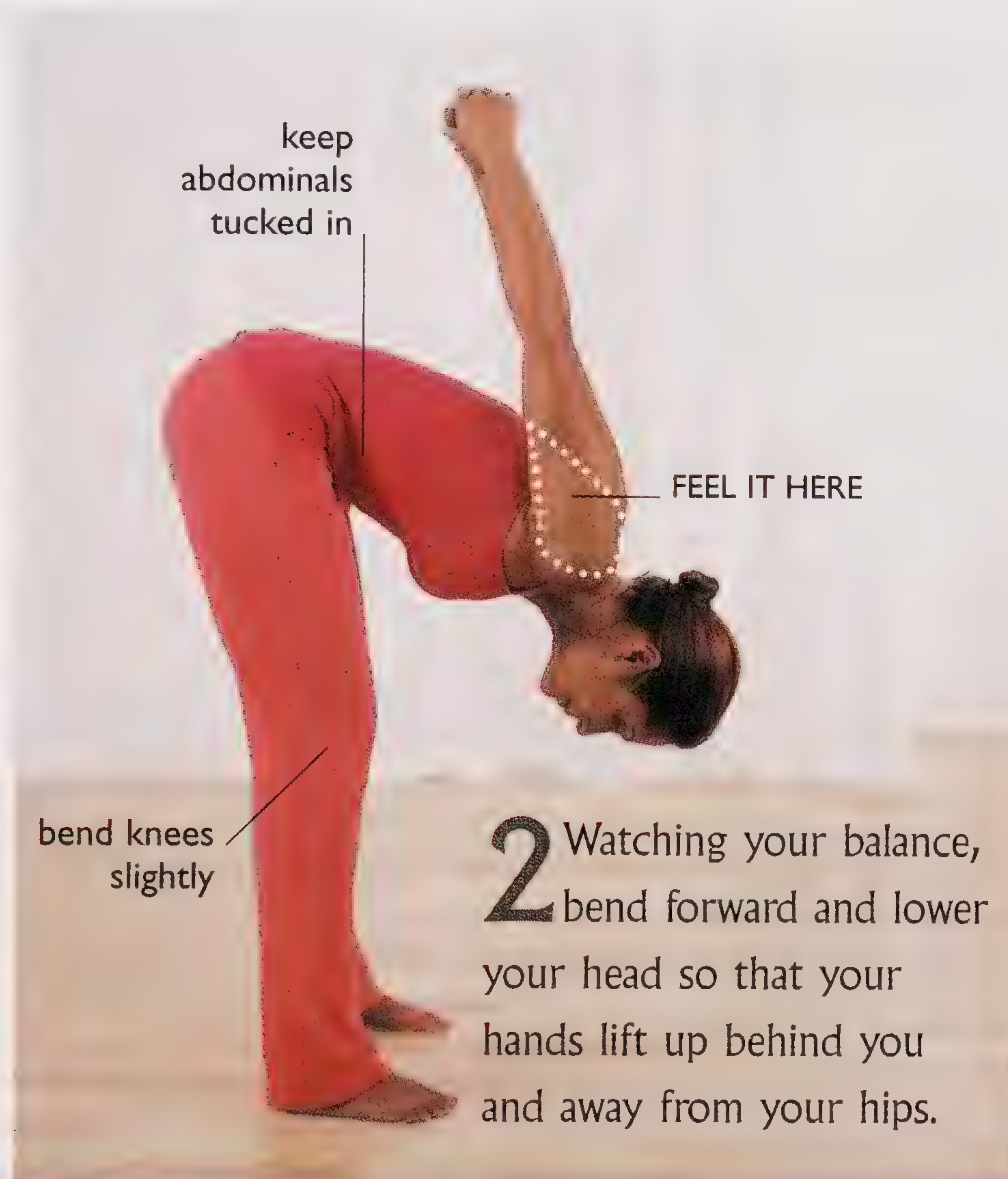


HANDS-BEHIND-BACK TWIST

We tend to round our shoulders forward when using the phone. This stretch counteracts that tendency by opening the chest as well as helping to pull the head back so that it aligns over the spine.



1 Stand straight, with feet hip-width apart. Tighten your abdominals, and pull your navel into your spine. Roll your shoulders up and back, and clasp your hands behind you.



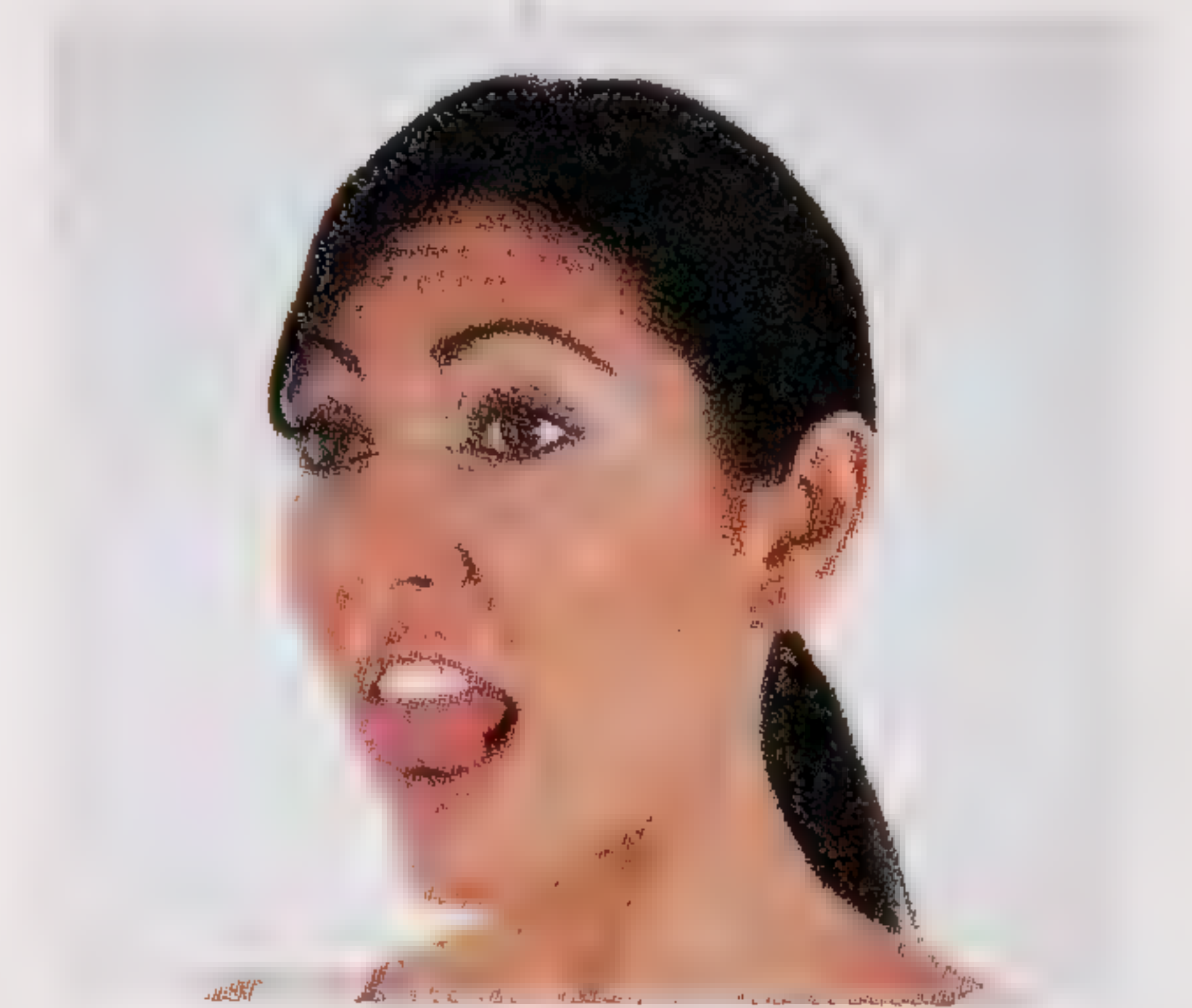
2 Watching your balance, bend forward and lower your head so that your hands lift up behind you and away from your hips.



3 Twist your hands to the left and hold for 2 breath cycles. Feel the right side of your chest open up. Repeat, gently twisting to the other side.

MINI CATALOG

Long phone conversations wreak havoc on the neck, shoulders, and arms. Some of these stretches can be performed while chatting.



lion stretch p23
say “ahhh” for 5 counts



head tilts p24
hold for 2 breath cycles each; repeat on other side



shoulders side p27
hold for 4 breath cycles; repeat on other side



twist, arms crossed p33
hold for 2 breath cycles; repeat on other side

STANDING

Waiting in line, waitressing, retail work, or just wandering around a museum, all take their toll on the muscles in the back, legs, and feet. You can perform these stretches relatively inconspicuously while on your feet, or at home where you can relax. Generally, for the unweighting stretches, lean away from the area of discomfort.

STRETCHING HELPS TO:

- **counteract leg swelling**
caused by poor circulation of fluids trapped in the lower body.
- **prevent lower back**
compression and pain associated with standing for long periods.

lean head
to side

press
into hip



LEG UNWEIGHTING

Standing, unweight your left leg by shifting your weight onto your right leg. Place your left hand on your waist and your right hand on your hip. Lift your ribcage up, pull your navel into your spine, and lean your shoulders to the right. Hold for 2 breath cycles, then repeat on the other side, if appropriate. If you suffer from lower back pain on one side, lean away from that side.

ROLLING FEET

This rocking motion is an unweighting technique for the feet. It encourages good posture by helping to re-establish optimum weight distribution over the arches. It doesn't have to be a big motion to have a big effect.



1 Stand up straight and lift your pelvic floor so that it feels as if your spine is being pulled upward. Gently roll back on your feet, lifting your toes and shifting your weight back onto your heels.

2 Gently roll forward on your feet, shifting your weight away from your heels and onto your toes. Repeat this rolling motion backward and forward about 5 times, or more if desired.

THE THINKER

Prop your right foot up on a support such as a step, stool, doorstep, or curb. Bend your right knee, pull your navel into your spine, and lean forward. Prop your elbow up on your thigh and rest your chin on your hand. This relieves your right leg while your left leg supports your weight. Repeat with the left foot propped up to relieve pressure on your left leg.

pull
stomach in

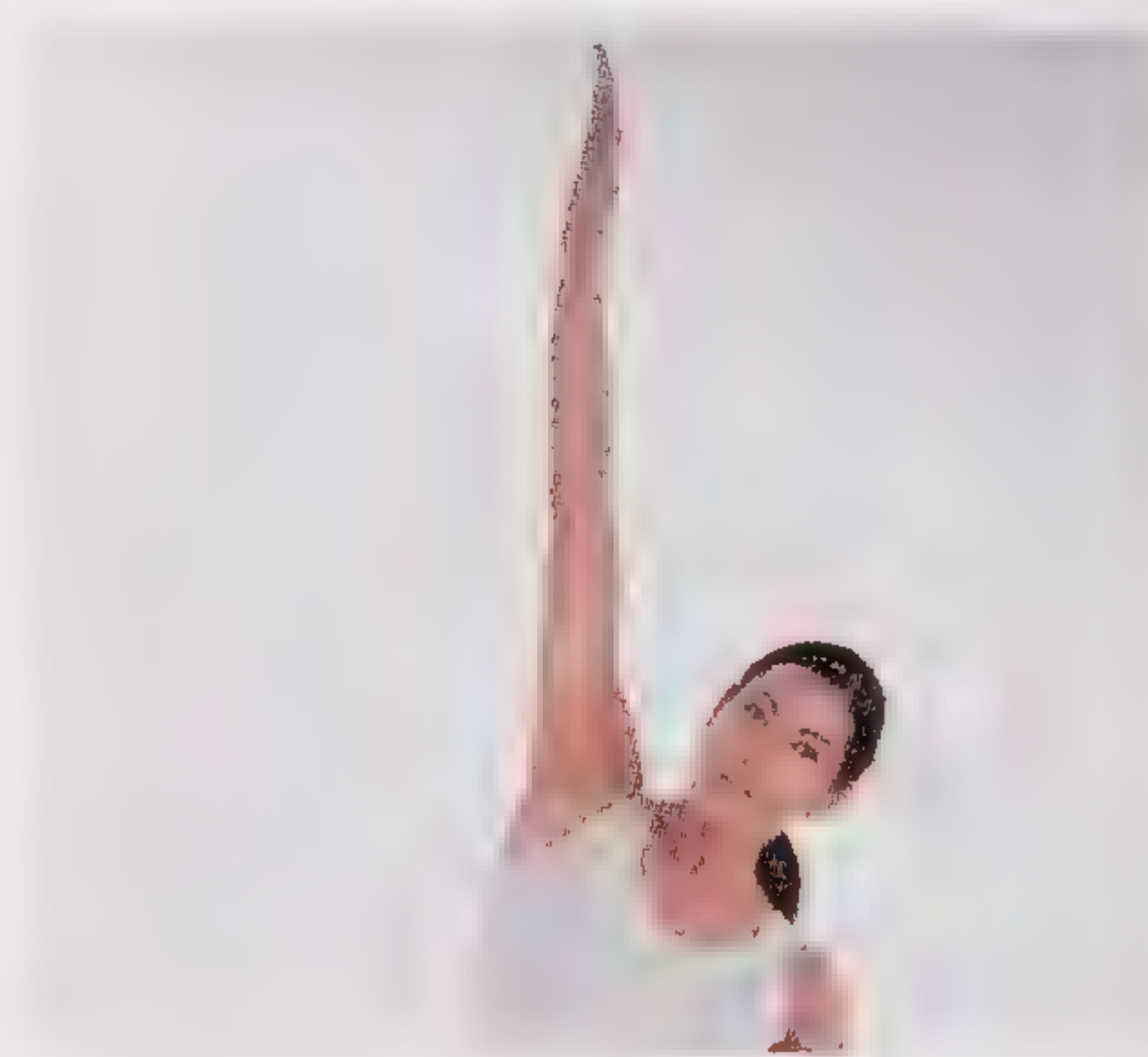


MINI CATALOG

Give yourself a lift, and decrease fatigue by adding this sequence of ankle, torso, and foot stretches to your routine.



ankle circles p50
circle 5 times, each direction;
repeat with other foot



standing side stretch p31
hold for 4 breath cycles;
repeat on other side



standing waist twist p40
hold for 2 breath cycles;
repeat on other side



transverse arch p51
repeat both steps 5 times
on each foot

SITTING

We have a tendency to slump forward as we get older. Sitting slightly forward in your chair and gently pulling your buttocks together will help you to elongate your spine and sit up straight. The rule of thumb when sitting for long periods is to stretch regularly, at least every half hour, and before you are uncomfortable.

SHOULDER BLADE SQUEEZE

Sit up straight. Hold your abdominals firm to anchor yourself. Move your arms behind you; gently pull your shoulder blades back. Imagine a wall behind you, and press your palms against it with fingers pointing downward. Hold for 3 breath cycles.

keep shoulders
back and down

FEEL IT
HERE



Back view: Shoulder blades are squeezed together; shoulders are back and down

STRETCHING HELPS TO:

- **decompress** the bottom of the pelvis and lower back, helping to prevent pain and discomfort.
- **restore muscle length** in the hips and thighs, preventing knee pain and problems standing up.

HIP TILT

lean head
toward
lifted hip



Place your hands on either side of you on your seat. Lean to the left, taking the weight off of your right hip bone, and tilt your head to the right. Hold for 1 breath cycle, then repeat, leaning to the right, if appropriate. If you have pain on just one side, only unweight and shift away from that side.

HIP WALK BACK

This stretches the lower back and the muscles in the back of the pelvis, areas that typically become stiff after prolonged periods of sitting.

1 Sit toward the front of your seat. Ensure that you are sitting up straight with your feet flat on the floor. Line up your knees.

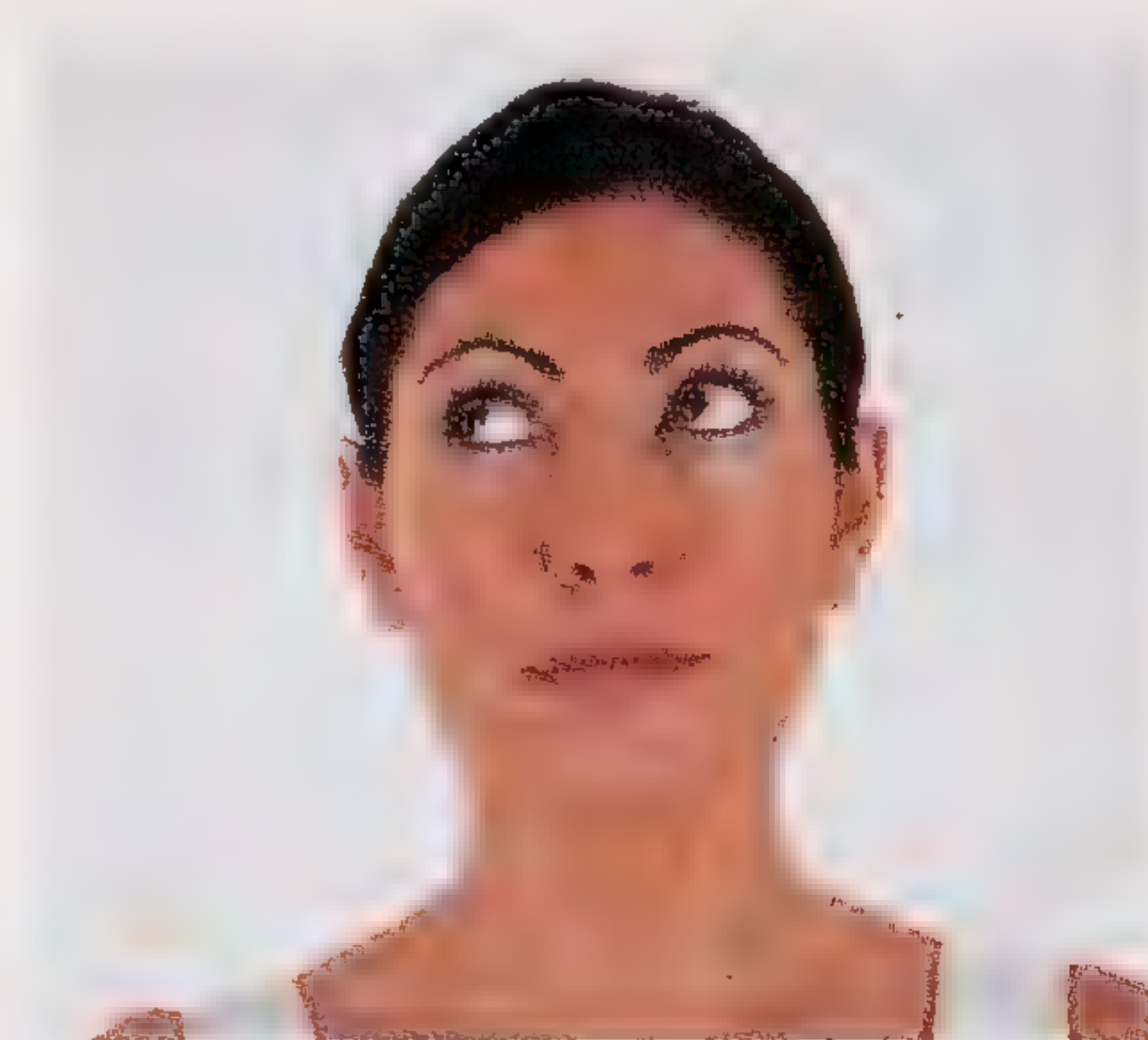


2 Press your left hip back into the chair and hold for 1 breath cycle. Then press your right hip back. Perform this 4 times, alternating from side to side and moving backward.



MINI CATALOG

These stretches will help to prevent eye and hand strain. They will also give your body a reviving lift if sitting for long periods.



eye stretches p23
repeat sequence once



clasped fingers p28
hold for 3 breath cycles



arms open p29
hold for 3 breath cycles



leg-cross hip stretch p43
hold for 4 breath cycles;
repeat on other side

LIFTING AND HAULING

First, ensure that your lifting technique is biomechanically sound: Keep your back straight, tilt from your hips, and get under the weight so that you can lift with your legs. Whether you are lifting heavy weights, handling a toddler, or moving bags of garden soil, be sure to stretch out muscles that have been put under strain.

STRETCHING HELPS TO:

- **prevent lower back** muscle strain and disc injuries, common complaints after lifting weights.
- **restore normal back** motion after the compressing effect on the spine of lifting a heavy weight.

LUNGE WITH FISTS IN BACK

Step your left foot forward into a lunge. Press the fists of both hands into your lower back as you lift your chest diagonally upward. Hold for 3 breath cycles, feeling a good stretch in your calf, lower back, and chest. Repeat with the right foot stepped forward.



STEP HIP STRETCH

Step your left foot onto a step or stair in front of you and bend your knee. Place your hands, one on top of the other, on your thigh. Lift your chest diagonally upward and lift your chin. Hold for 3 breath cycles, then step down and repeat with your right foot propped up.



STANDING BACK TWIST

This twisting stretch benefits the spine and opens the chest, shoulders, and arms. Use your back muscles to twist, and stay as vertical as possible.



1 Stand with feet shoulder-width apart. Lift your pelvic floor and pull your navel into your spine. Clasp your hands behind your head and open your elbows so they point out to the sides.



2 Twist to the right. Look to the right as you pull your elbows back and press your head back. Hold for 3 breath cycles, then twist back to the front and repeat, twisting to the left.

MINI CATALOG

Be sure to stretch your arms and complete these additional stretches to help restore your upright posture after lifting.



arm stretch p28
hold for 3 breath cycles



front hip stretch p42
hold for 3 breath cycles;
repeat on other side




side hip stretch p43
hold for 4 breath cycles;
repeat on other side



standing quad stretch p44
hold for 3 breath cycles;
repeat on other leg





STRETCHES FOR DIFFERENT LIFE STAGES

The exercises in this section are designed for those times of life when a gentler approach to stretching is required. During pregnancy, stretching can help maintain flexibility and prepare the body for delivery, but it is important to work within comfortable limits. After pregnancy, gentle stretching can help rebalance your muscles. In later life, the goal is to keep the whole body supple, but particularly the spine and hands. Respect your body's limitations, but rely on regular stretching to keep you active and energized.

PREGNANCY

Muscle tightness in the chest, lower back, and hips is common during pregnancy. As you grow in size, your center of gravity changes, which can unbalance your posture. Perform these stretches every day to help your flexibility for delivery. For side-lying stretches, place a pillow under your waist to support your back.

CAUTIONS AND TIPS

- **Confirm** with your doctor that it is safe for you to perform these stretches.
- **Listen to your body** and don't overdo it. Stretch only as far as is comfortable.

WIDE SQUAT



Step your feet a comfortable distance apart. Keeping your hips tucked under, and supporting yourself by placing your hands on your thighs, slowly squat down. Feel a gentle stretch in your inner thighs. Hold for 4 breath cycles. Work up to repeating this 3 times.

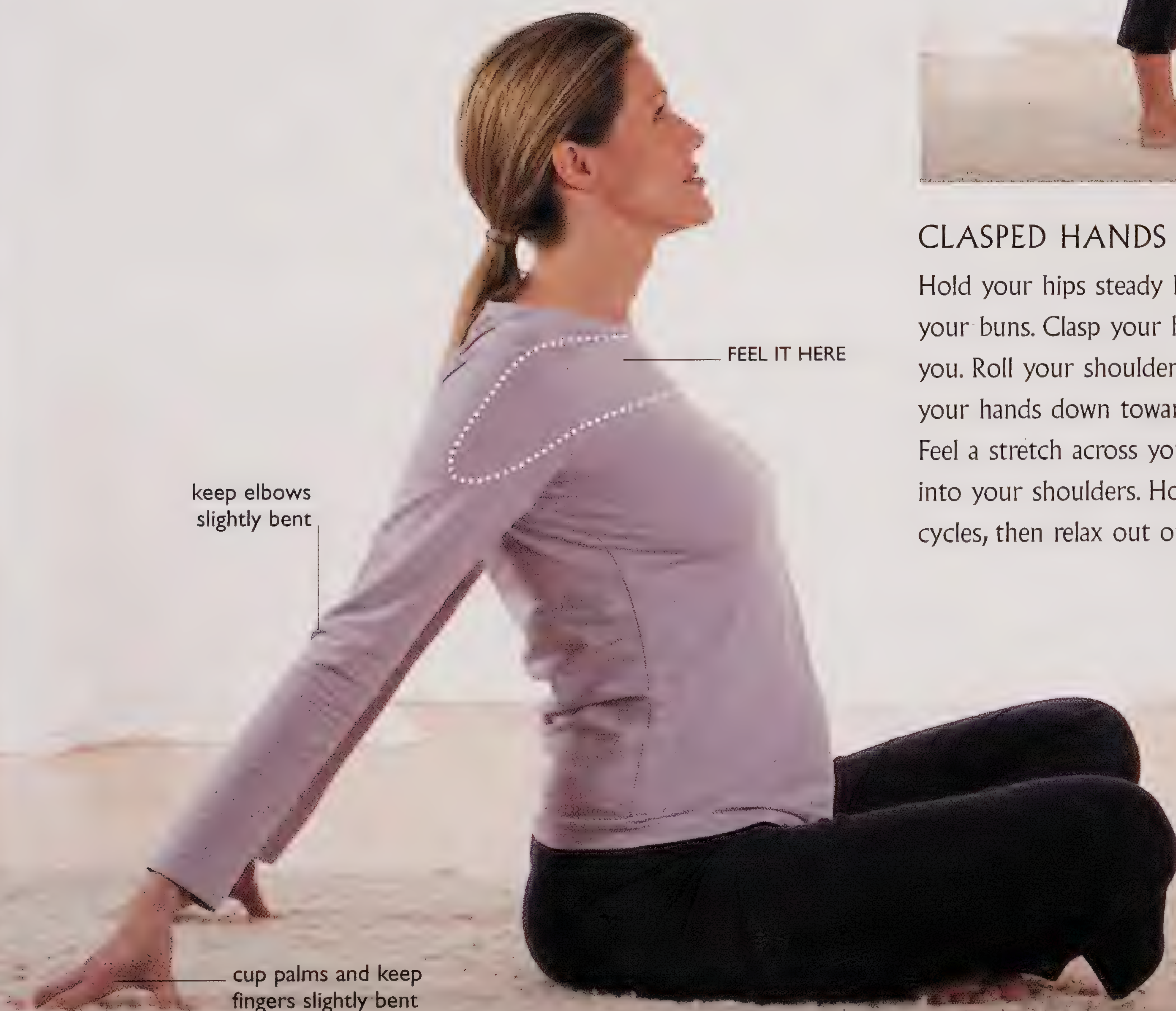
GENTLE GLUTE STRETCH

Sit on the floor. Extend your right leg out to the side and bend your left knee, bringing your foot toward the groin. Place your right hand in your lower back and reach your left hand toward your right leg, touching it if you can. There should be no pain in your lower back or bent knee. Hold for 3 breath cycles, then repeat on the other side.



CROSS-LEGGED CHEST LIFT

Sit comfortably on the floor and cross your legs. Reach back with both your hands and support yourself on your fingertips, keeping your fingers slightly bent. Exhale and press down gently on your hands as you lift up your chest. Look up diagonally and breathe for 4 breath cycles, then relax down. Repeat 2 more times.



CLASPED HANDS BACK

Hold your hips steady by tightening your buns. Clasp your hands behind you. Roll your shoulders back and pull your hands down toward your feet. Feel a stretch across your chest and into your shoulders. Hold for 4 breath cycles, then relax out of the position.

LYING HAMSTRING STRETCH

Lie on your left side with a pillow under your waist. Slightly bend your left leg. Straighten your right leg in front of you, grasp it at the top of the calf, and pull it toward your chest. Feel a stretch along the back of your leg and hold for 4 breath cycles. Repeat on the other side.



LYING INNER THIGH STRETCH

Lie on your left side with a pillow under your waist. Slightly bend both legs. Straighten your right leg, grasp it inside the thigh, and open it, pushing your right hip forward. Feel a stretch along the inside of your thighs, and hold for 3 breath cycles. Repeat on the other side.



LYING QUAD STRETCH

Lie on your left side with a pillow under your waist. Slightly bend your left leg. Tuck your pelvis under as you reach back to grasp your right ankle or shin and gently pull. Feel a comfortable stretch in the front of your right thigh; hold for 3 breath cycles. Repeat on the other side.



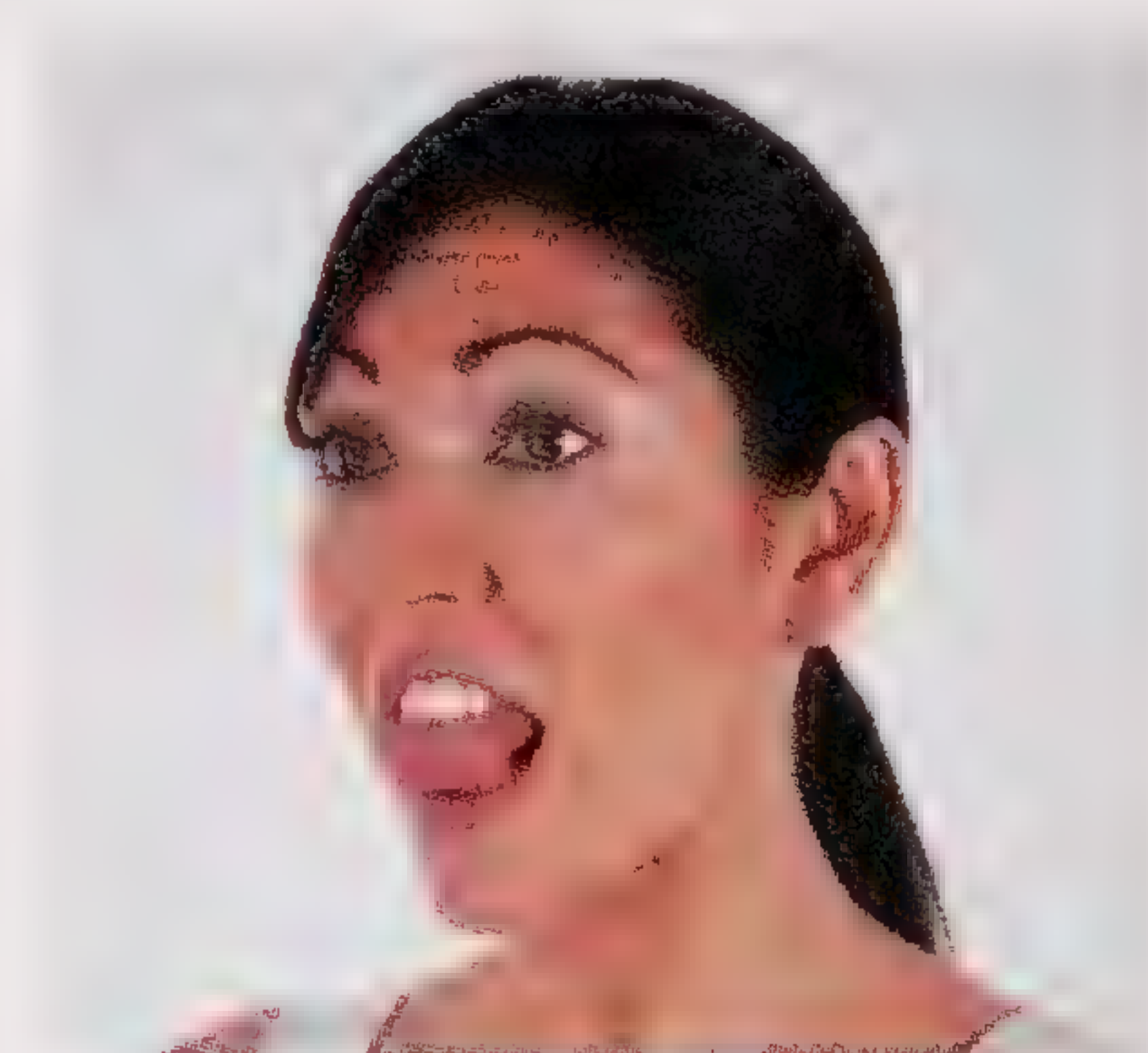
CROSSOVER LEG TWIST STRETCH

Lie comfortably on your back. Press your lower back into the floor; bend your right leg, and cross it over your left. Reach your arms out to the sides, and relax into the stretch. Hold for 4 breath cycles, then repeat with your left leg crossed over your right.



MINI CATALOG

Stretch your jaws, which tighten with your changing center of gravity. Keep opening your chest, upper ribs, and calves too.



lion stretch p23
say “ahhh” for 5 counts



corner chest stretch p30
hold for 4 breath cycles



standing side stretch p31
hold for 4 breath cycles;
repeat on other side



basic lunge p48
hold for 4 breath cycles;
repeat on other leg

POST-PREGNANCY

Practice these simple stretches every day to help open the muscles in the lower back and chest, which may have tightened during pregnancy. Your center of gravity is shifting back to its pre-pregnancy posture; these stretches will help you to regain normal movement as well as re-train and re-balance your body.

CAUTIONS AND TIPS

Go slowly; avoid holding positions for longer than the recommended time, even if it feels good. For up to three months after the birth, high levels of relaxation in your body make it easy to overstretch, which can cause muscle imbalances and pain.

GENTLE HAMSTRING

Protect your lower back by tightening your abdominals as you pull your thigh to your chest.

1 Lie on your back and place both feet on the floor, knees slightly bent. Exhale, press your lower back into the floor, and gently pull your left knee toward your chest.

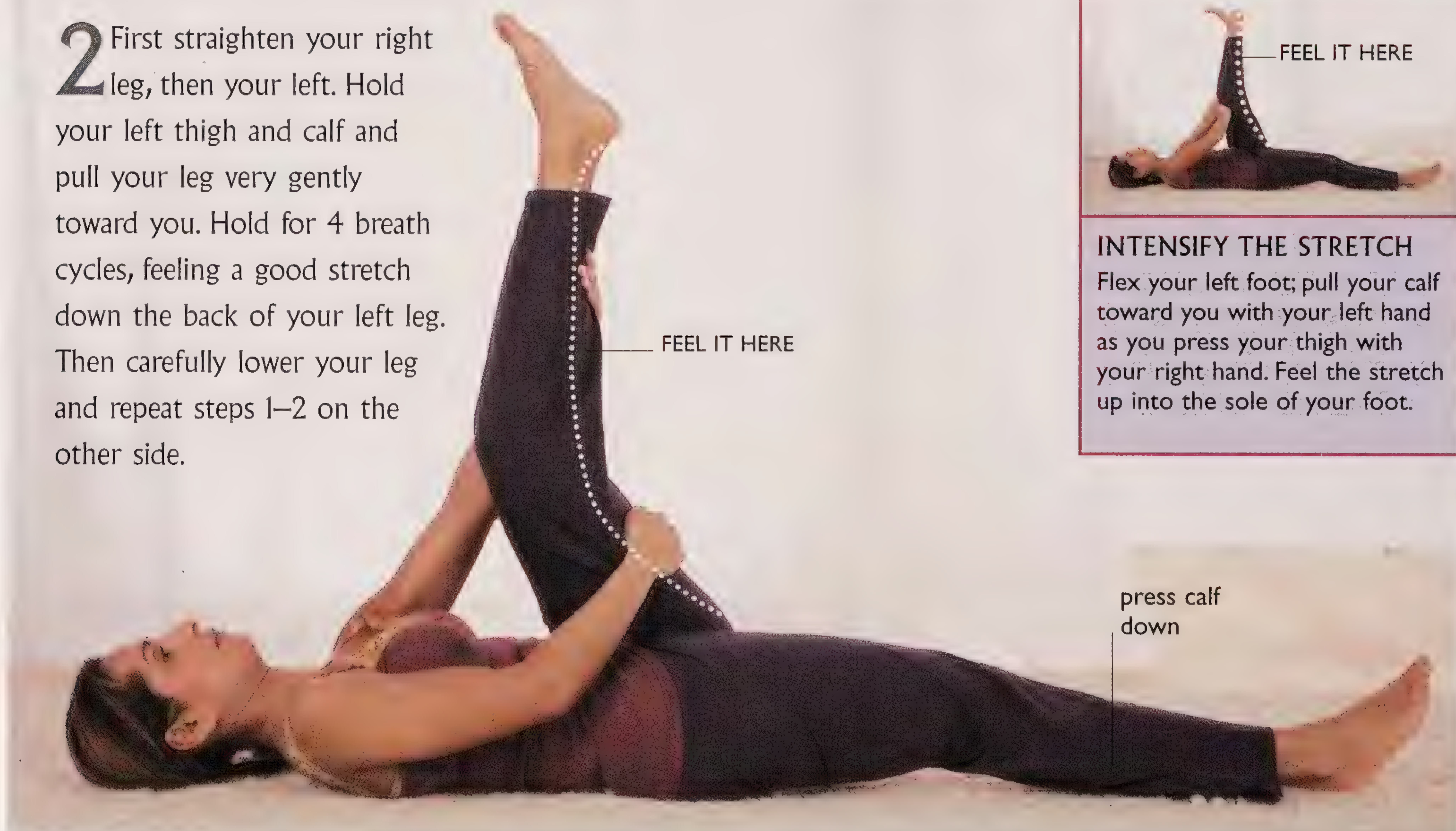


2 First straighten your right leg, then your left. Hold your left thigh and calf and pull your leg very gently toward you. Hold for 4 breath cycles, feeling a good stretch down the back of your left leg. Then carefully lower your leg and repeat steps 1–2 on the other side.



INTENSIFY THE STRETCH

Flex your left foot; pull your calf toward you with your left hand as you press your thigh with your right hand. Feel the stretch up into the sole of your foot.



CAT

Start on your hands and knees with your back flat. Inhale as you gently round your back like a scared cat and look at your navel. Imagine a hand lifting your abdomen up toward your spine. Exhale and slowly flatten your back again. Repeat this slow rounding and flattening of your back 5 times.

FEEL IT HERE

cave chest



INTENSIFY THE STRETCH

Tuck your toes under, and exhale as you lift your knees off the floor and round your back. Feel this more intense stretch along your back.

CAMEL

Start on your hands and knees with your back flat. Inhale as you lengthen your back, then arch it by tilting your pelvis down. Stretch your head up and back as if trying to get it to touch your buns. Exhale and slowly flatten your back again. Repeat this slow arching and flattening of your back 5 times.

FEEL IT HERE

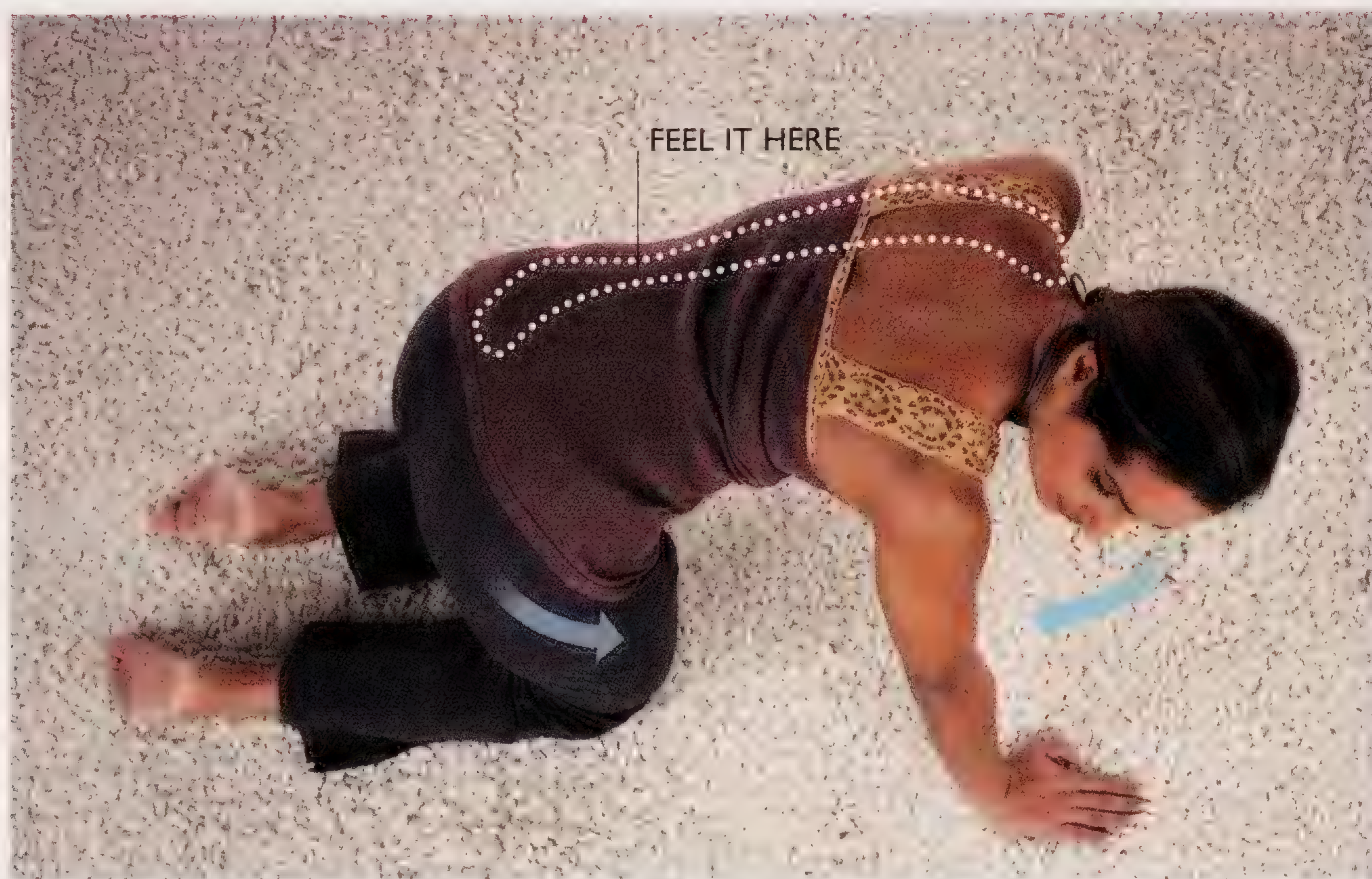
FEEL IT HERE

stretch head up
and forward

slightly bend
elbows

ALLIGATOR

Start on your hands and knees with your back flat. Inhale as you turn your head to the right and look toward your right hip. Feel the stretch along your left side as you slowly exhale. Then inhale and turn your head toward your left hip, exhaling as you stretch your right side. Repeat this moving stretch, right and left, 5 times.

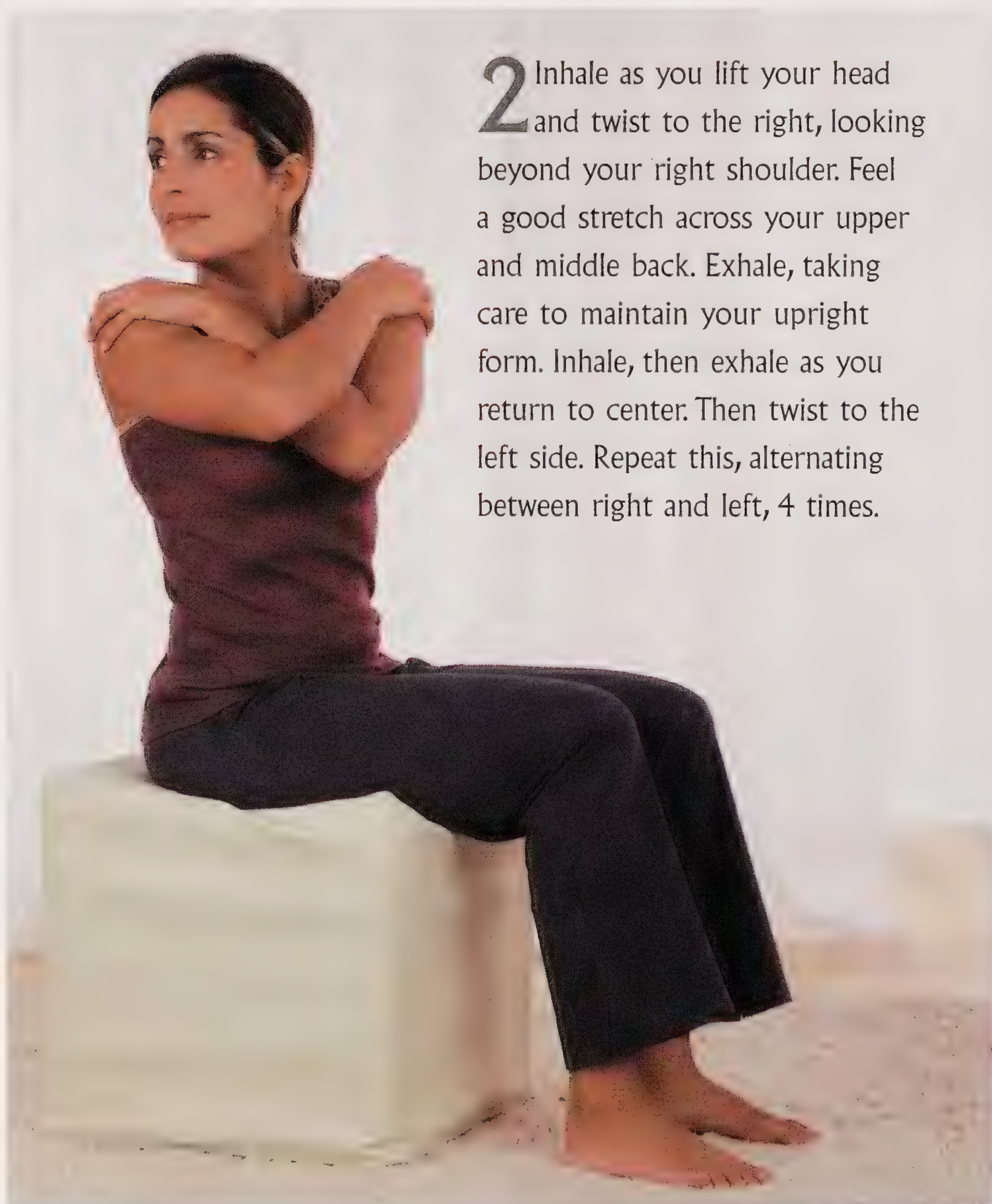


CONTROLLED TWIST

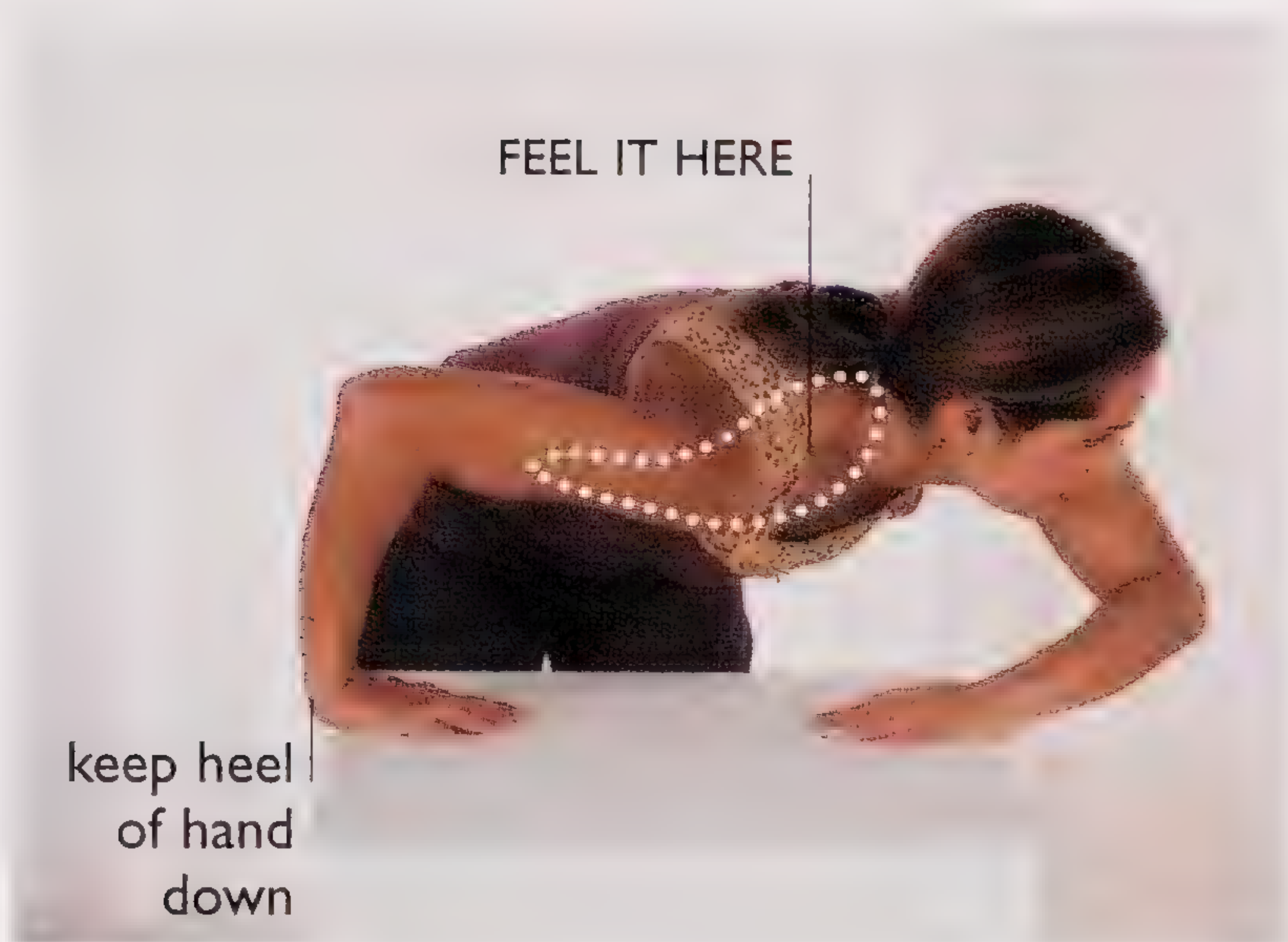
Keep your head lifted as you twist—imagine that it is suspended by a string from the ceiling.



1 Sit up straight, with your feet flat on the floor. Place your hands on opposite shoulders.



2 Inhale as you lift your head and twist to the right, looking beyond your right shoulder. Feel a good stretch across your upper and middle back. Exhale, taking care to maintain your upright form. Inhale, then exhale as you return to center. Then twist to the left side. Repeat this, alternating between right and left, 4 times.



SHOULDER OVAL STRETCH

Here, moving in an oval shape, you stretch the upper back, armpits, arms, throat, and chest.

1 Place your hands on a surface in front of you. Position them under your shoulders with fingers slightly splayed, pointing inward. Round your upper back.

2 Hold your abdominals firm, and press your right shoulder toward your left hand. Look to the left, feeling a good stretch in your right shoulder and into your neck.

3 Sweep your breastbone down and around to the center. Feel the stretch in the fronts of your shoulders and across your chest.

4 Continue making the oval shape as you sweep across to the right, pressing your left shoulder toward your right hand. Look to the right, feeling the stretch in your left shoulder and neck. Repeat steps 1–4, circling in the opposite direction.

MINI CATALOG

New mothers need plenty of upper body relief from holding and nursing infants. Be sure to stretch your face, neck, and arms.



lion stretch p23
say “ahhh” for 5 counts



neck stretch p24
hold for 2 breath cycles;
repeat on other side



clasped fingers p28
hold for 3 breath cycles



arms open p29
hold for 3 breath cycles

LATER IN LIFE

Regular stretching can help to keep us flexible and active well into old age. As we get older, stretching can help to preserve spinal mobility and maintain hand dexterity. If you have trouble with balance, it is possible to perform all of these stretches seated. It's amazing how much can be accomplished in a chair.

CAUTIONS AND TIPS

- **Listen to your body**, and keep in mind that we all have different capabilities.
- **Some muscle ache** is normal when stretching, but you should feel no pain from these stretches.

SEATED SPINAL ROLL

To help you to round your back as you roll down, pull your navel into your spine and imagine stretching

your upper body up and over a fence. As you roll back up, imagine a pull from the seat of your chair.



1 Sit slightly forward on a chair, your feet flat on the floor, and place your hands on your thighs. Sit up straight and try to align your head over your pelvis.

2 Tuck your chin into your chest and roll down your spine, lowering your head toward your knees. Inhale and pull your navel into your spine as you lower.

3 Exhale, and very slowly roll back up until you are sitting upright again. Repeat steps 1–3 4 times, moving slowly and only going as low as is comfortable.

GENTLE SEATED TWIST

Be sure to keep your chest lifted as you perform this stretch. As you twist to the right, sit a bit more heavily on your left hip to prevent you from lifting it off the chair, and vice versa.



1 Sit slightly forward on a chair, your feet flat on the floor. Sit up straight and place your right hand on your lower back with fingers pointing downward, and your left hand on your right thigh.

2 Gently turn to the right, and look beyond your right shoulder. Use your left hand to help you to hold the twist. Stay in position for 2 breath cycles, then relax. Switch hand positions and repeat, twisting to the left. Perform once more on each side.

FEEL IT HERE

pull gently
with left hand



ANKLE REACH

To help your balance as you lean forward, open your eyes and consciously focus on your leg.



1 Sit slightly forward on a chair, your back straight. Reach your right heel in front of you, keeping your knee slightly bent. Place both hands on your right thigh.

keep lower
back flat

press hand
against thigh

FEEL IT
HERE



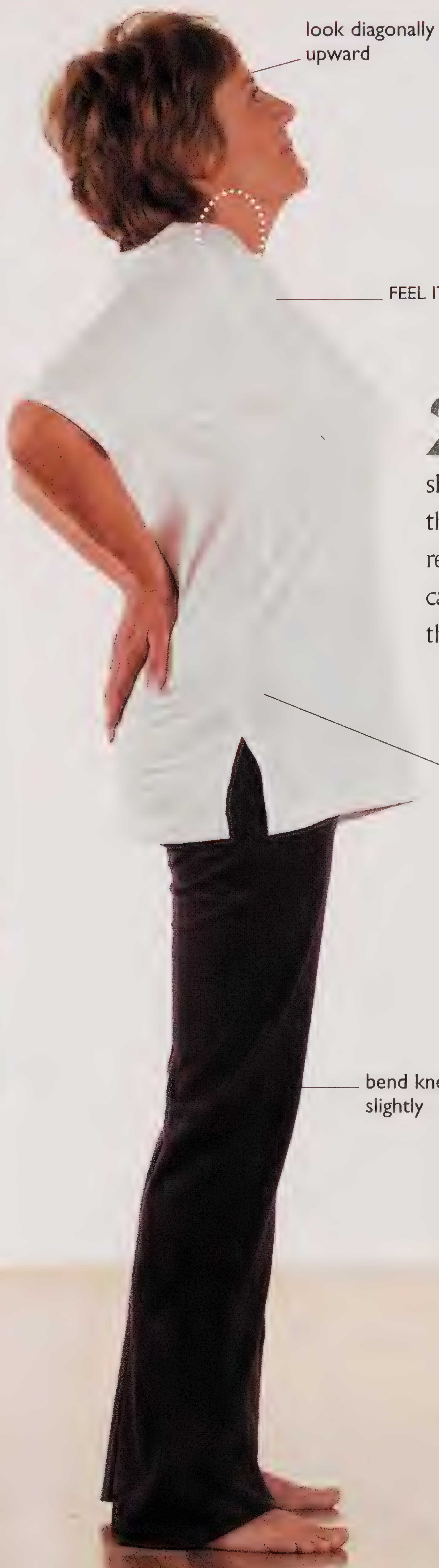
2 Lean forward, keeping your mid-section firm. Twist slightly, reaching your left hand to your right ankle. Hold for 2 breath cycles, then slowly sit up. Repeat on the other side, reaching to your left ankle. Perform once more on each side.

CHEST THRUST

It is possible to perform this stretch seated: Begin by sitting slightly forward on a chair with feet flat on the floor.



1 Stand with feet hip-width apart and roll your shoulders back to open your chest. Place your hands, fingers pointing downward, on your lower back.



look diagonally upward

FEEL IT HERE

2 Inhale as you push your chest upward and try to pull your shoulders back. Exhale as you hold the position, then inhale as you relax and return to the start. Be careful not just to tip back. Repeat this stretch 5 times.

keep hips pressed forward

bend knees slightly

FINGER SPLAY

Regular stretching can help to keep your hands and fingers flexible. Really open your fingers as wide as you can in step 2.

1 Stretch your arms out in front of you, open your chest, and pull your shoulders back. Flex your wrists and press your palms forward with fingers together.

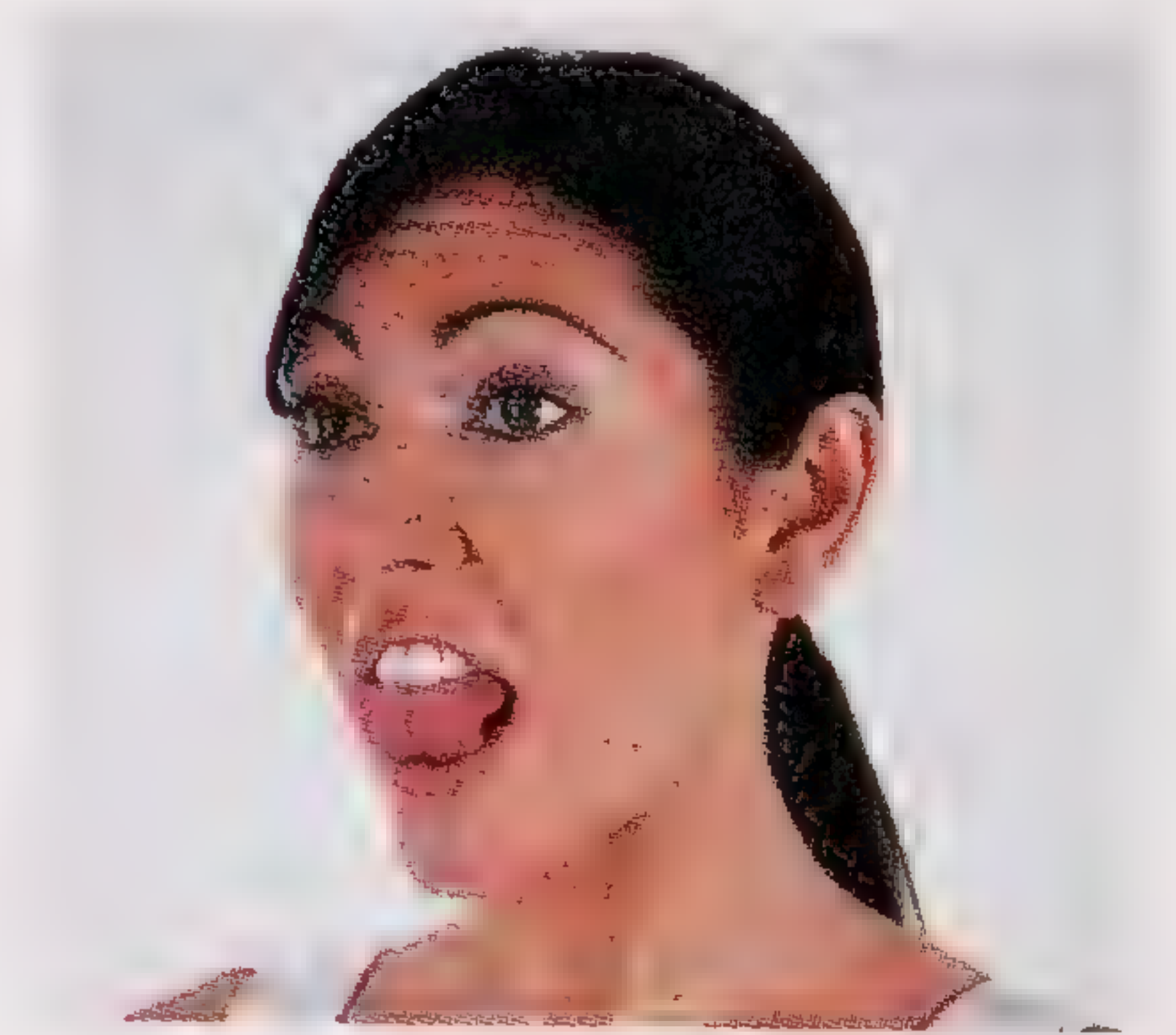


2 Open and splay your fingers, spreading them as wide as possible. Then bring your fingers together again. Work up to repeating this stretch, opening and closing your fingers, up to 20 times, if you can.



MINI CATALOG

Stretching your face, arms, and waist on a regular basis helps to keep you feeling uplifted, energized, and alert.



lion stretch p23
say "ahhh" for 5 counts



eye stretches p23
repeat sequence once



arms open p29
hold for 3 breath cycles



seated waist stretch p41
hold for 2 breath cycles;
repeat on other side



THERAPEUTIC STRETCHES

For those days when you wake up with a crick in your neck, have tired hands from typing, or feel the nagging discomfort of lower back pain, gentle stretching can bring great relief. In this section I present therapeutic stretches for each of the body's typical problem areas. As always, it's important to respect your limits—the goal is not to increase discomfort but to alleviate it. Think of these stretches as preventative measures. What you remedy in the hips and calves can have lasting therapeutic repercussions in the back—everything is interconnected!



NECK AND SHOULDERS

The neck, shoulders, and arms work together as a functional unit. Usually all three areas are involved when there's a problem with any part of the group. As always, exercise caution when stretching anything that is sore, and breathe into the movements. The Towel Rock, below, will work wonders for a crick in the neck.

CAUTIONS AND TIPS

Try wrapping a packet of frozen peas in a dish towel and applying it to the affected area for 20 minutes.

TOWEL ROCK

If one side of your neck is stiff or achy, begin by rocking away from that side. However, moving in both directions can help to restore range of motion.

1 Start by folding a towel lengthwise into thirds. Lie down with knees bent and place the folded towel behind your head. Hold the longer end on your chest, the other by the side of your face. Press your lower back into the floor.

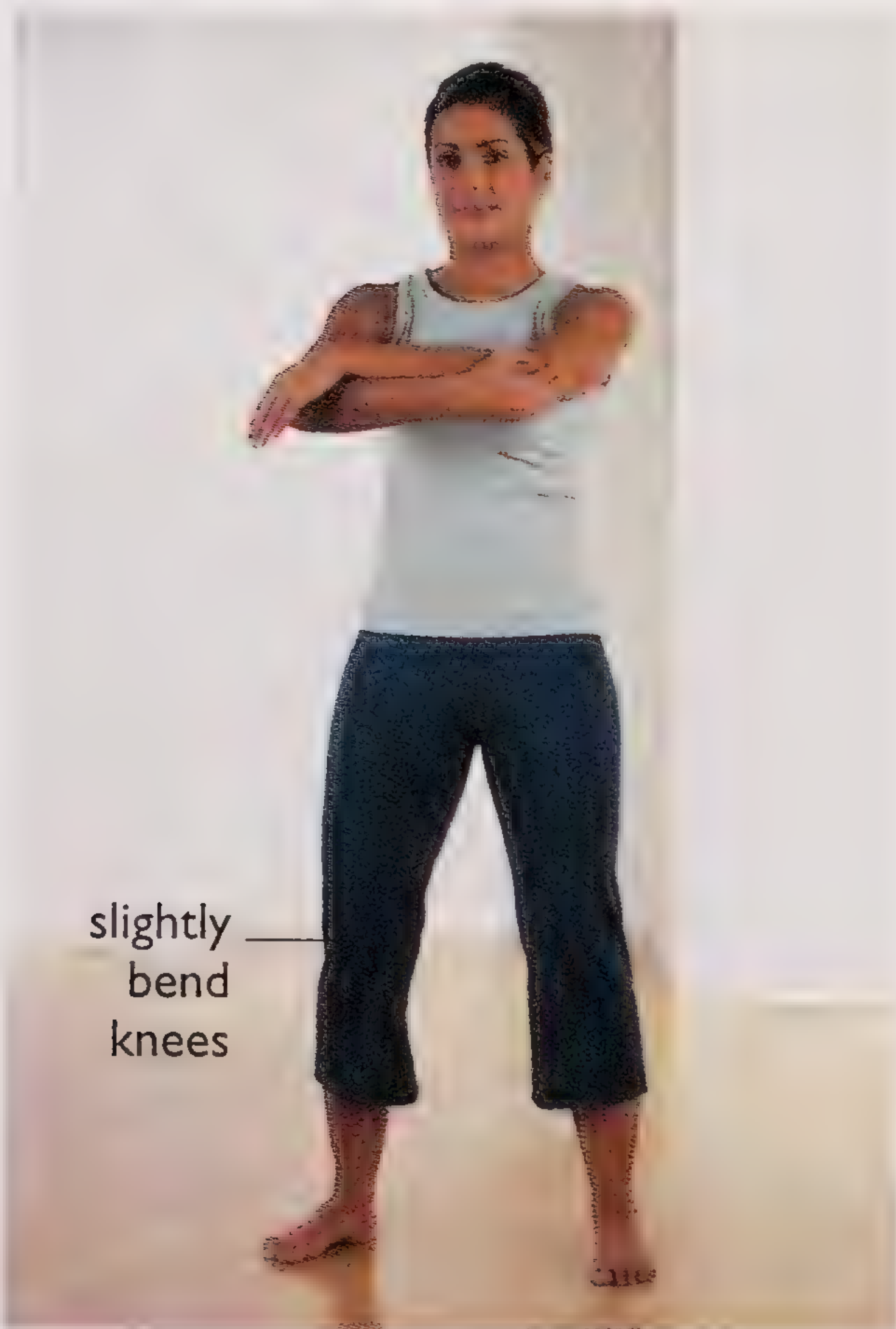


2 Grasp the towel firmly at your chest with your right hand. Gently rock your head to the right by pulling the towel with your left hand. Perform about 10 small and smooth rocking motions. Repeat on the other side, if it is comfortable to do so.



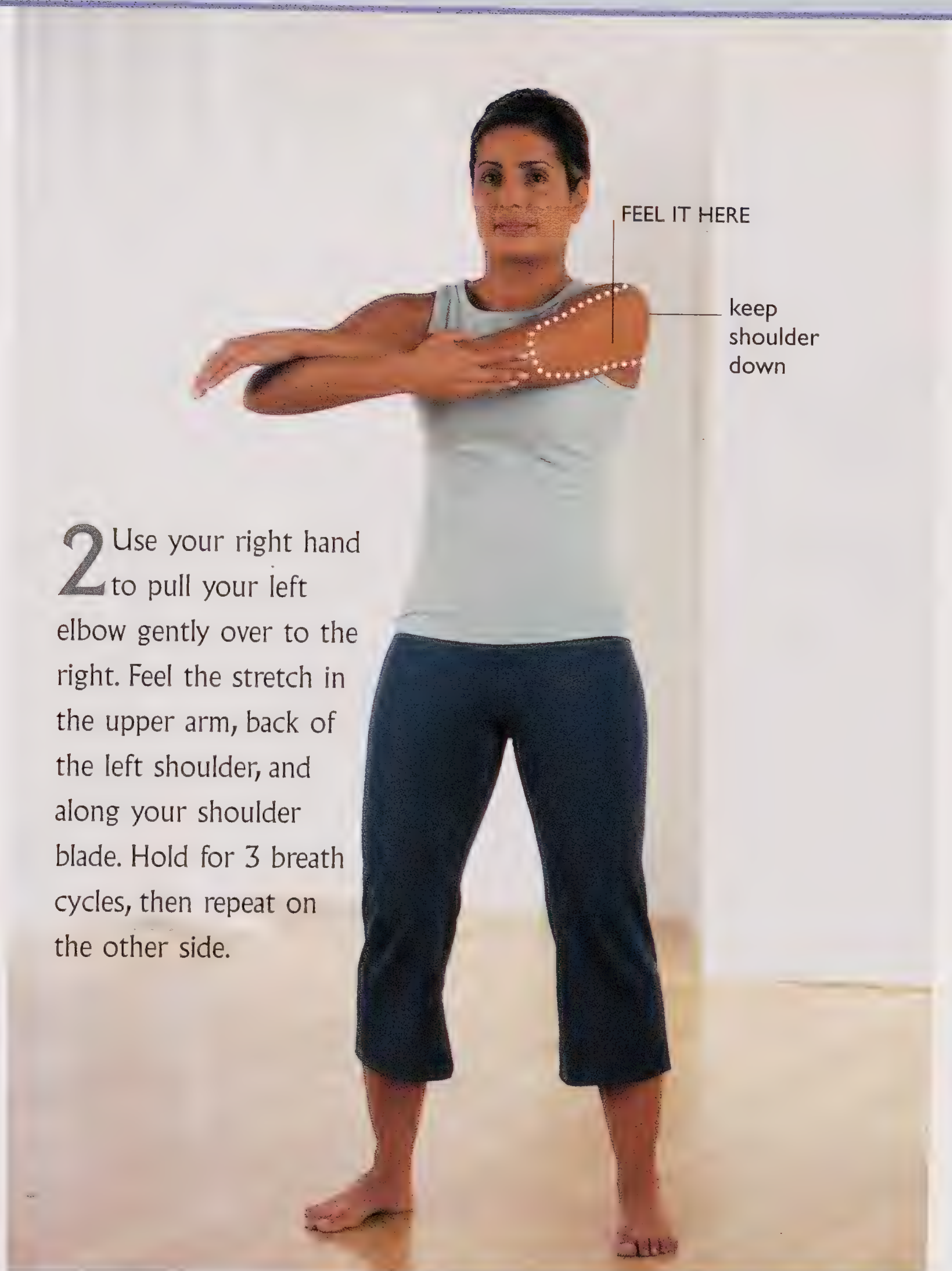
ARM CROSS

Be sure to keep your shoulder from riding up toward your ear as you lift your elbow slightly. Ensure that your elbow remains at chest level.



1 Stand with feet a little more than shoulder-width apart. Hold your hips steady by pulling your navel into your spine and tightening your buns. Cup your left elbow in your right hand, holding under the arm.

2 Use your right hand to pull your left elbow gently over to the right. Feel the stretch in the upper arm, back of the left shoulder, and along your shoulder blade. Hold for 3 breath cycles, then repeat on the other side.



FACE CLOCK

Lie on your back with knees bent. Imagine that your face is a clock: 12 is the crown of your head, 3 is your right ear, 6 is your chin, and 9 is your left ear. Roll your head back slightly to 12, then, pressing your head into the floor at each number, slowly move round to 3, 6, 9, and finally 12 again. Perform 4 clock circles in each direction. Breathe normally throughout.

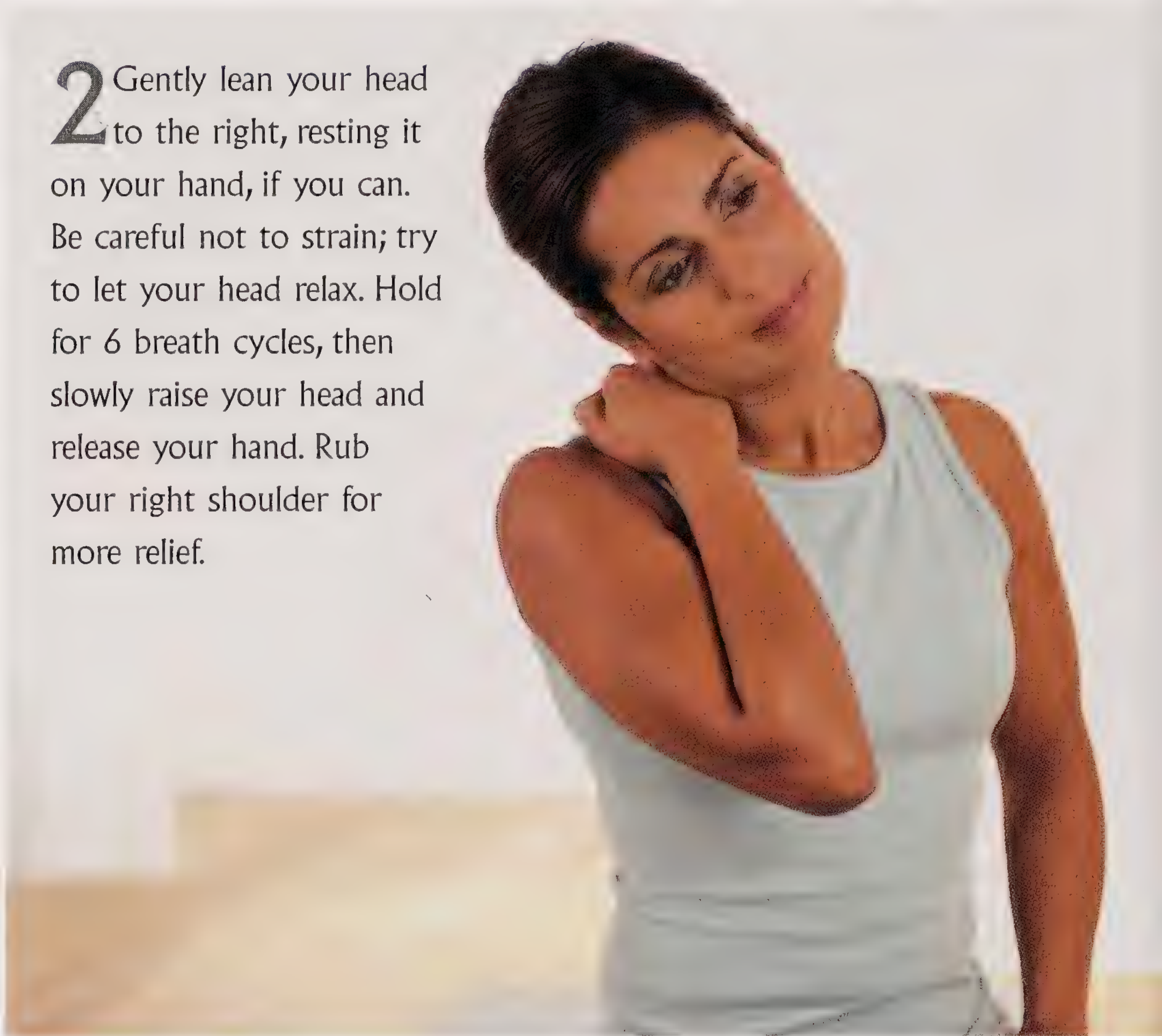
SHOULDER HOLD

This stretch is demonstrated on the right side of the neck, but perform it to the affected side.



1 Cup your right hand on your trapezius, the meaty area at the top of your shoulder. Gently squeeze with the heel of your hand and pads of your fingers as you pull up.

2 Gently lean your head to the right, resting it on your hand, if you can. Be careful not to strain; try to let your head relax. Hold for 6 breath cycles, then slowly raise your head and release your hand. Rub your right shoulder for more relief.



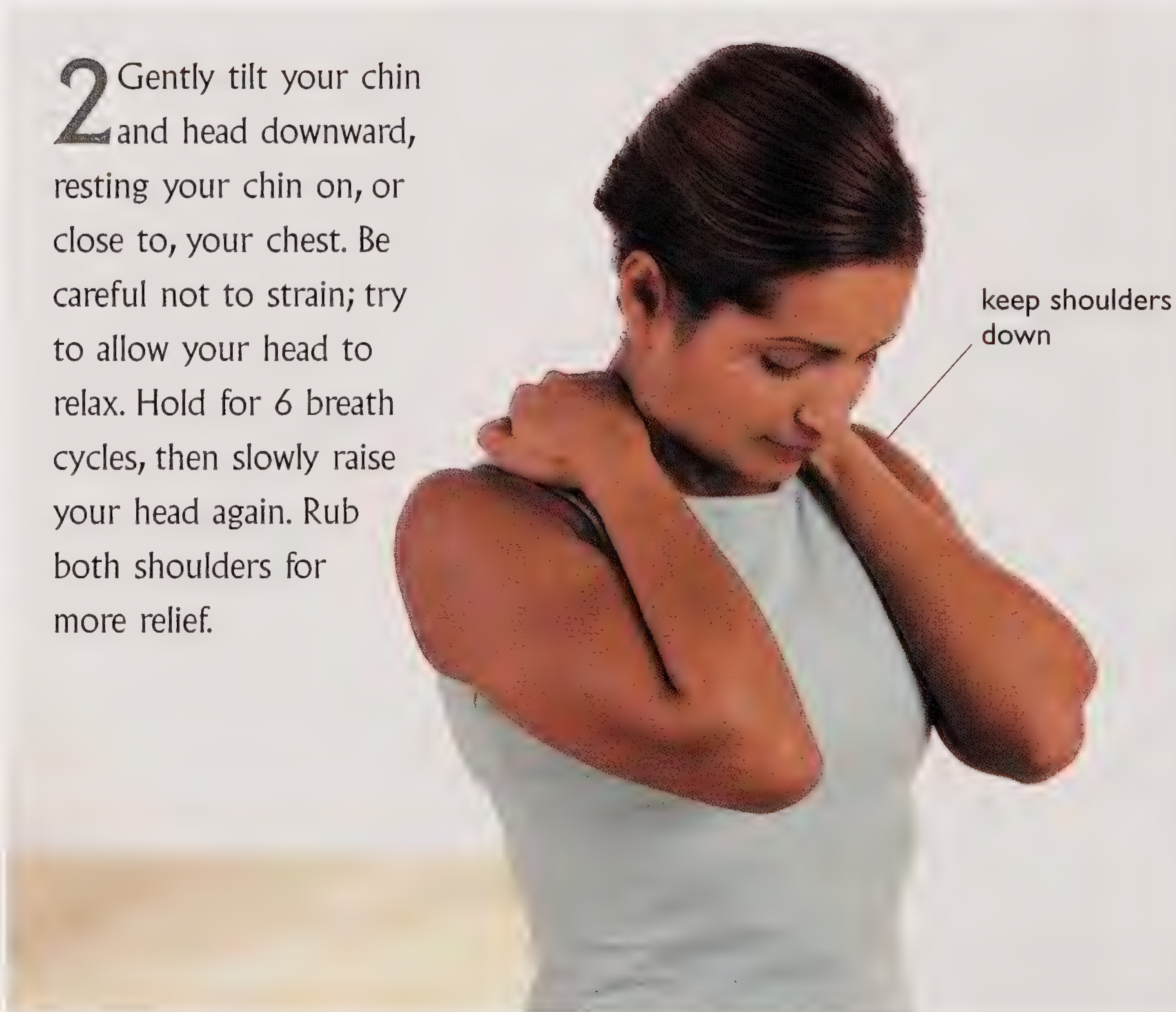
TWO-HANDED HOLD

Try this stretch to relieve the discomfort of a stiff or sore neck.



1 Cup both trapezius muscles, the meaty areas at the tops of your shoulders, in your hands. Squeeze with the heels of your hands and pads of your fingers as you pull up.

2 Gently tilt your chin and head downward, resting your chin on, or close to, your chest. Be careful not to strain; try to allow your head to relax. Hold for 6 breath cycles, then slowly raise your head again. Rub both shoulders for more relief.



PENDULUMS

Use a countertop or table for support when performing this moving shoulder stretch.



1 Lean forward, brace yourself on a support, and flatten your back. Allow your right arm to dangle freely, then make 10 circles in each direction. Repeat on the other arm.



2 Relax your right arm and allow it to dangle freely. Gently swing it back and forth like a pendulum. Do this 10 times, then repeat on the other arm.

SHOULDER ROLLS

Stand straight and hold your pelvis steady by pulling your navel into your spine and tightening your buns. Try to keep your head aligned over your spine as you perform slow shoulder rolls: Forward, up past your ears, then back, squeezing the shoulder blades together. Complete the roll by pulling your shoulders down. Perform 10 shoulder rolls in this manner.

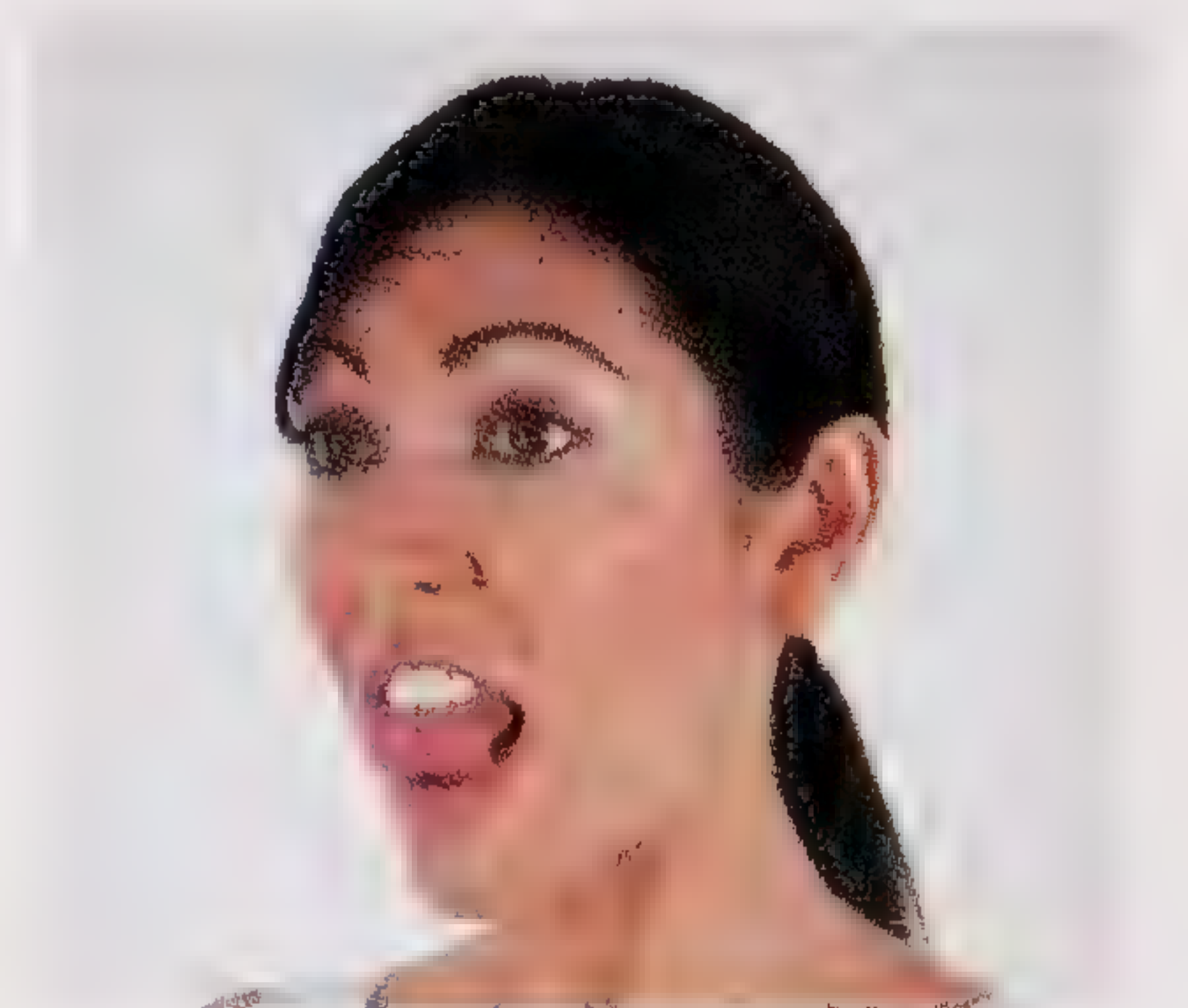


MINI CATALOG

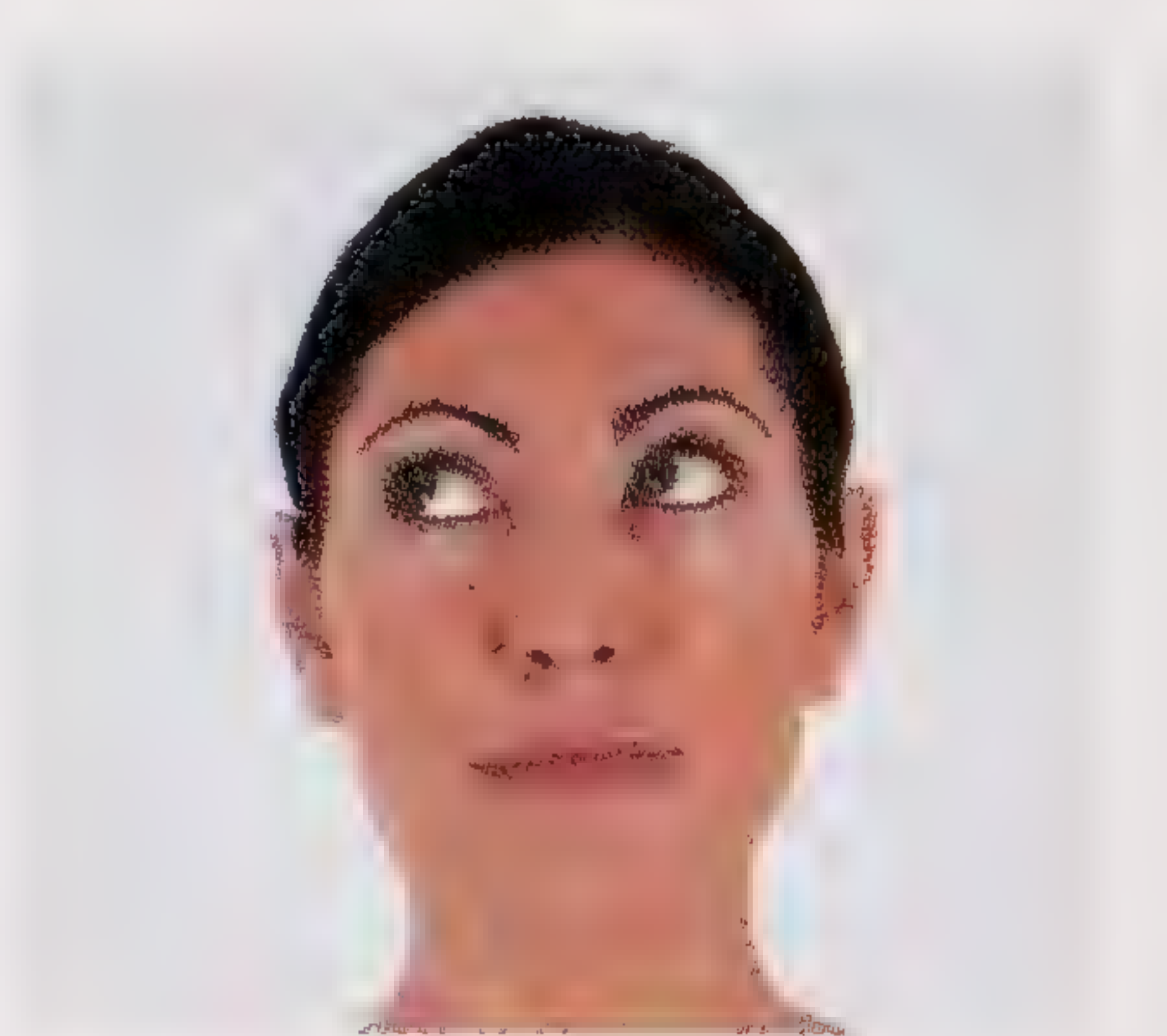
You will be amazed by how much neck and shoulder relief these scalp, face, eye, and hand stretches provide.



hair pull p22
perform 2 times, moving around the head



lion stretch p23
say "ahhh" for 5 counts



eye stretches p23
repeat sequence once



clapsed fingers p28
hold for 3 breath cycles

ARMS AND HANDS

You may be surprised to see stretches for the chest and ribcage here, but these are key to resolving repetitive stress injuries (RSI) in the arms and hands. Combined with stretches that aim to correct bad postural habits, they can help to ease compressed nerves and increase circulation to tight muscles and connective tissue.

CAUTIONS AND TIPS

Anyone performing repetitive actions with the hands, such as typing, knitting, or gardening, runs the risk of developing RSI. The best prevention is to break the cycle of tension and stress by taking stretching breaks every 30 minutes.

BALLOONING

This stretches the muscles in the chest and ribcage—consider it to be stretching from the inside out. Keep your back firmly on the floor.

1 Lie on your back with your knees bent. Place one hand on your lower ribcage, thumb between the breasts, and one on your abdomen, thumb at your navel. Breathe in through your nose as you expand your chest and simultaneously tighten your abdominals.



2 Breathe out through your mouth as you press down on your breastbone and chest, as if squeezing your chest, while you simultaneously expand your abdomen. Take regular breaths in through your nose, then out through your mouth. Repeat 10 times, and work up to 20 repetitions. Be sure not to “buck” the spine back and forth.



ARC SWEEP

This opens the muscles in the armpits and the sides of the ribs—stretching these areas can help to prevent RSI problems.

1 Lie on your right side with a pillow or two under your upper body to raise it off the floor a little. Scissor your legs so that the top, left one is back. Extend your arms in front of you with hands together.



2 Inhale as you trace an arc with your top, left hand. Use your back, left foot to keep your top hip forward, and slowly sweep your arm across the floor above your head so that it finishes behind your head. Exhale as you reverse the arc and bring the arms back together again. Perform 4–6 sweeps, then repeat on the other side.

HAND ROLL

This stretch helps to preserve shoulder flexibility, which deteriorates over time and can be lost when performing repetitive activities with your arms directly in front. The key is to keep your hands curled throughout the stretch.

3 Continue rolling your hands and arms until your elbows point upward. Then exhale as you unwind your arms. Start from the shoulders, then slowly lower your elbows, straighten your arms, and uncurl your hands and fingers. Repeat this winding and unwinding 3 times.



1 Stand up straight, with your feet shoulder-width apart. Hold your hips steady by pulling your navel into your spine and tightening your buns. Start with your hands at thigh level, with palms facing out.



2 Inhale as you roll your arms up until your elbows point forward. Touch your shoulders with the backs of your fingers.

keep elbows
close to head

FEEL IT HERE



FISH SWIM

This stretch helps to increase circulation to the nerves in the arms and hands. Be sure to keep your palms together and your shoulders relaxed.



1 Place your palms together and begin moving your hands as a unit in a horizontal figure-eight pattern. Smoothly move your hands down to the left, and then up and around.



2 Continue moving your hands down to the right, and then up and around again. Let your shoulders and head move naturally with the pattern. Repeat 4 times, then reverse direction.

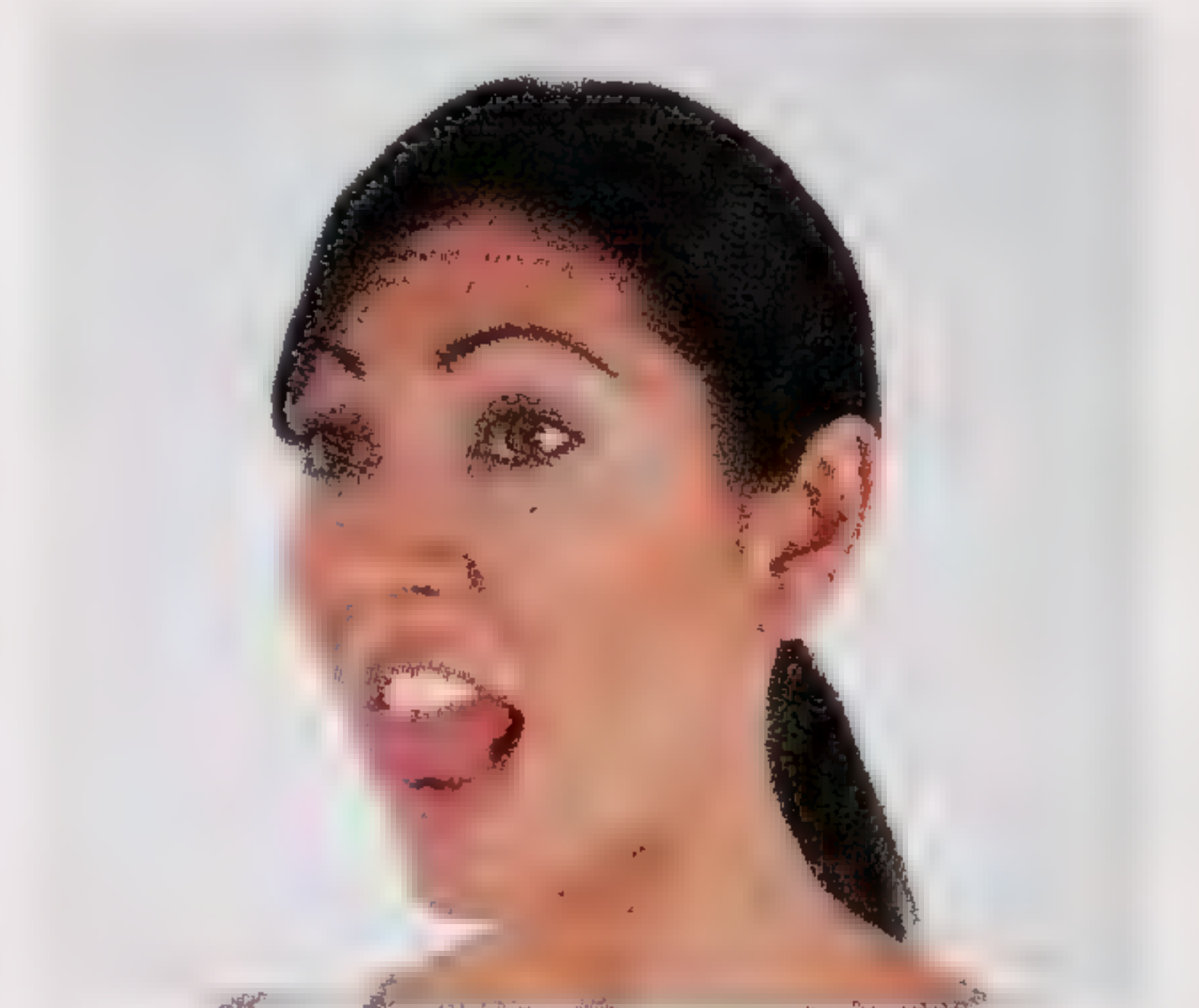
ARM PRESS DOWN



Place your forearm on a firm, flat surface. Place the heel of your other hand on the meaty part of your forearm, just below the elbow, and apply firm pressure. Hold for 4 breath cycles, then repeat on the other arm.

MINI CATALOG

Include these additional stretches in your routine. Muscle tightness in the face and upper body also affects the arms and hands.



lion stretch p23
say “ahhh” for 5 counts



arms open p29
hold for 3 breath cycles



clasped fingers p28
hold for 3 breath cycles



twist, arms crossed p33
hold for 2 breath cycles;
repeat on other side

LOWER BACK

It is estimated that 80 percent of North Americans will experience lower back discomfort at some point in their lives. Try these gentle “relievers” to help ease the pain. Remember to respect your lower back—it takes so much abuse and can truly bring us to our knees if we are not careful.

CAUTIONS AND TIPS

- **See a healthcare** advisor if you experience consistent back pain for more than 10 days.
- **These stretches** are for minor back pain only and are not a substitute for medical advice.

DIAGONAL KNEE ROCK

Lie down and position a folded towel under your lower back for support. Pressing your lower back into the towel, exhale and slowly bring one knee and then the other to your chest. Generally, the rule is to rock away from the side of the back with discomfort. Hug your knees, and gently rock your knee diagonally toward the opposite shoulder 10 times. Repeat on the other side, if appropriate.



SACRAL CIRCLES

Lie down and position a folded towel under your lower back for support. Pressing your lower back into the towel, exhale and slowly bring one knee and then the other to your chest. Use your hands to circle your knees. Breathe normally as you circle your knees 5 times in each direction.



ONE-KNEE HUG

Lie down and position a folded towel under your lower back for support. Bend your knees, keeping both feet on the floor. Press your lower back against the towel, put your hands behind your knee, and gently pull it toward your chest. Stay for 1 breath cycle, then exhale and lower the foot down. Repeat this, alternating legs, 10 times.



TWO-KNEE HUG

Lie down and position a folded towel under your lower back for support. Bend your knees, keeping both feet on the floor. Press your lower back against the towel and exhale as you lift one thigh then the other and hug your knees to your chest. Stay for 3 breath cycles, then keeping your lower back pressed into the towel, lower one foot then the other. Repeat 2 more times.



LOW COBRA

Lie on your front. Place your hands, palms down, in front of you and line your elbows up under your shoulders. Press your thighs into the floor and exhale as you hold your abdomen firm and come up on your forearms. Raise your chest, feeling a lengthening in your lower back and abdomen. Hold for 2 breath cycles. Exhale as you lower your chest.



LYING LEG LIFT

Lie on your side with a folded towel or cushion under your waist. Support your head on your arm. Bend both knees so that they are at a 90° angle to your body. Exhale and unweight your top leg off of your bottom one, keeping your shins parallel. Hold for 1 breath cycle, then slowly lower your leg as you exhale. Do this 5 times, then repeat on the other side.

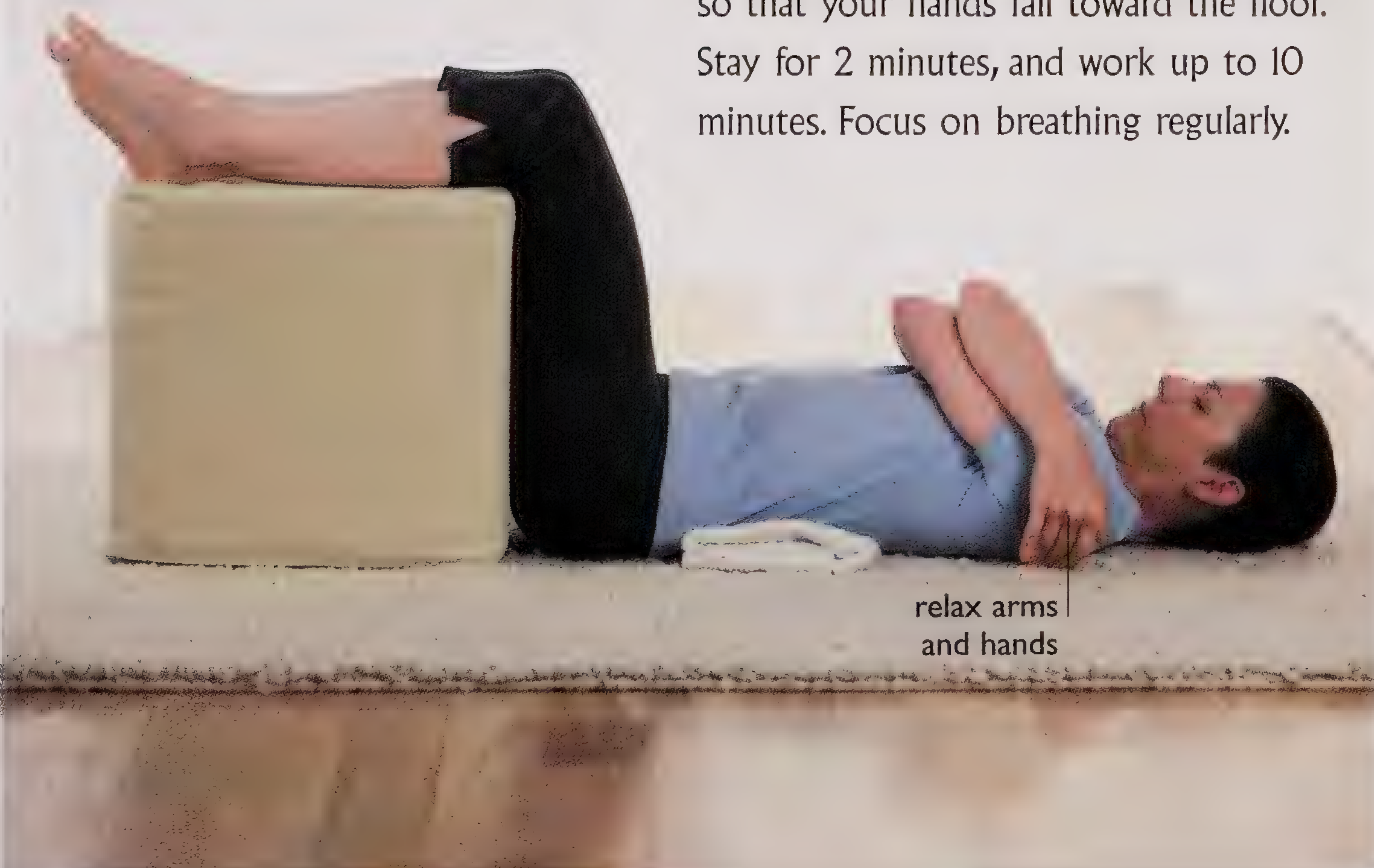
LYING BACK-RELAXER

Lie on your side with a folded towel or pillow under your waist. Support your head on your arm. Bend your knees slightly, and place a pillow between your legs. Stay in this passive stretch for 4 minutes. Repeat, lying on the other side.



SUPPORTED BACK-RELAXER

Lie on your back, your legs propped up on a chair at 90°. Position a folded towel under your lower back. Exhale and cross your arms over your ribcage so that your hands fall toward the floor. Stay for 2 minutes, and work up to 10 minutes. Focus on breathing regularly.



MINI CATALOG

Stretching your arms, waist, and hips relieves pressure on the spine and will help to keep your back happy.



standing side bend p31
hold for 4 breath cycles;
repeat on other side



knees to chest p37
hold for 2 breath cycles



standing waist twist p40
hold for 2 breath cycles;
repeat on other side



basic lunge p48
hold for 4 breath cycles;
repeat on other leg

HIPS

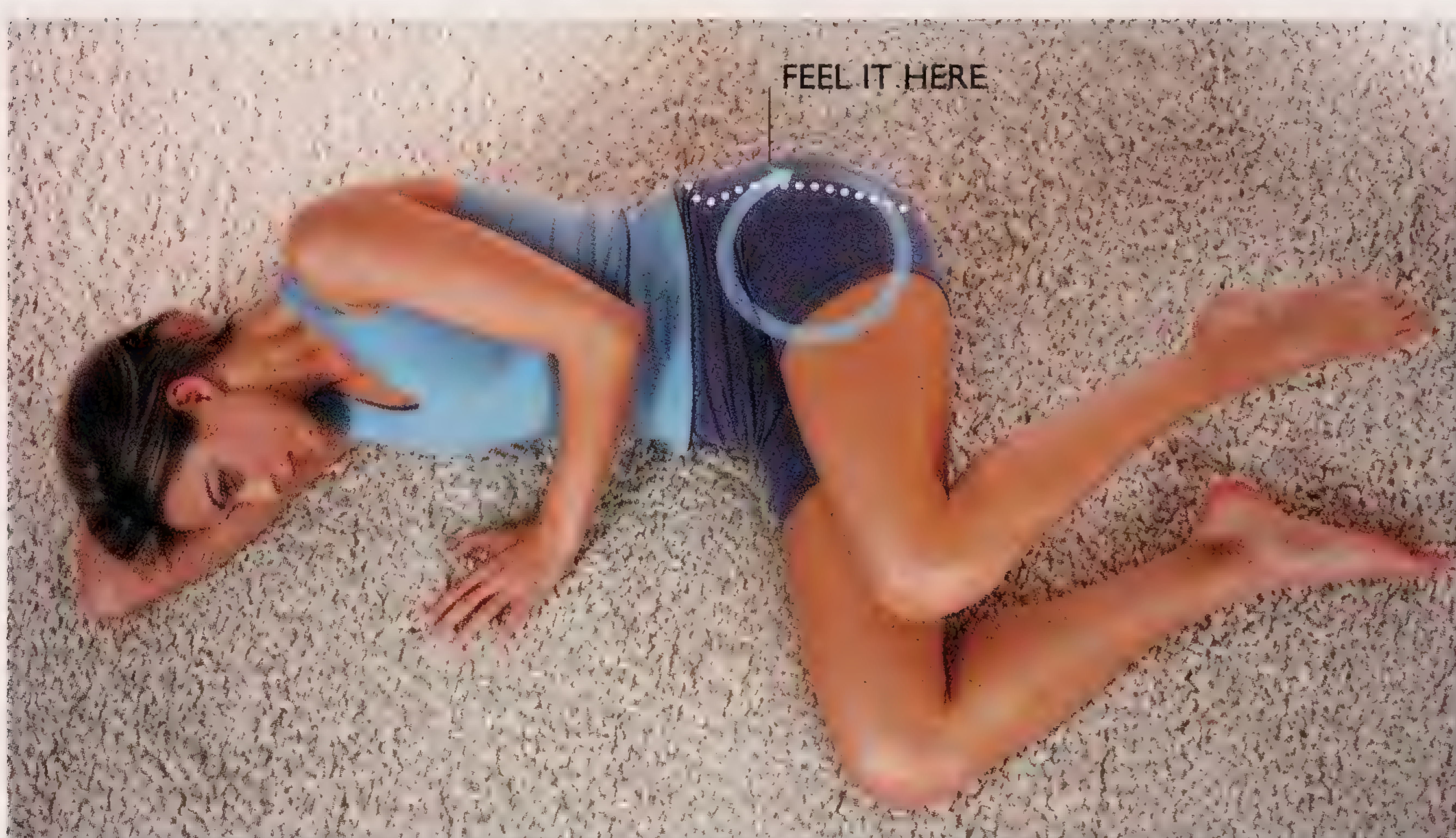
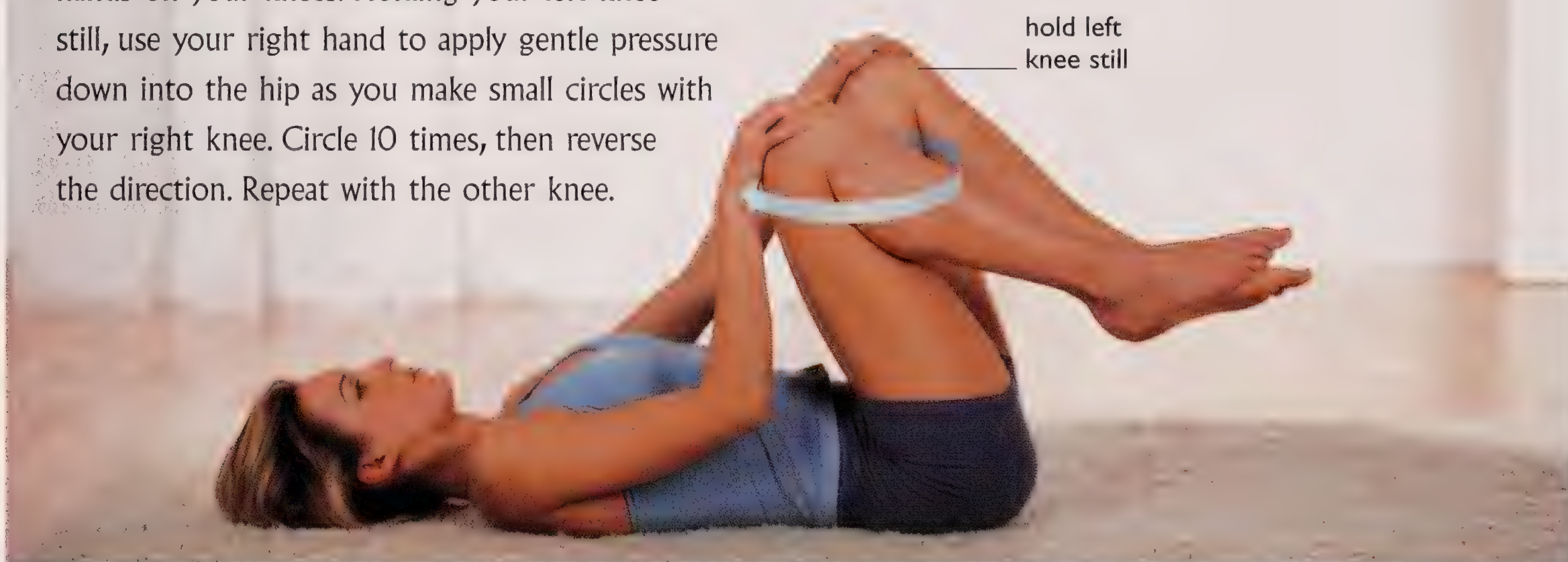
Both sitting and standing for long periods can cause discomfort in the hips. They support upper body weight when we are on our feet, and this is intensified by gravity's pull. Add carrying heavy bags or children, and it's little wonder that our hips often feel sore. Try these gentle stretches to help relieve aches and pains.

CAUTIONS AND TIPS

The upper legs should glide and move smoothly in the hip sockets. Consult your healthcare provider if you experience any catching, locking, or other discomfort when performing these movements.

HIP CIRCLES

Lie on your back and bend both knees so that they are at a 90° angle to your body. Place your hands on your knees. Holding your left knee still, use your right hand to apply gentle pressure down into the hip as you make small circles with your right knee. Circle 10 times, then reverse the direction. Repeat with the other knee.



PELVIC CIRCLES

Lie on your side and support your head on your arm, or a pillow if preferred. Bend both knees so that they are at a 90° angle to your body. Locate the bony bump at the top of your thigh, and use this as an imaginary axis as you form a slow, horizontal circle with your pelvis. Perform 6 circles, then reverse direction. Repeat, lying on your other side.



INVERSE FROG

Lie on your back, and press your lower back firmly into the floor. Place the soles of your feet together, and bend your knees, relaxing them open toward the floor. If your back is pulling off the floor, place a pillow under your pelvis. Stay for 8 breath cycles.



LYING HIP STRETCH

Lie comfortably on the floor. Press your lower back against the floor as you lift one thigh, then the other toward your chest. Cross your left ankle over your right knee. Pull your right thigh as you press your left knee away from you. Feel a good stretch in your left buttock and back of thigh. Hold for 5 breath cycles, then repeat on the other side.

MINI CATALOG

These stretches focus on the outer hip muscles and complement the inner hip joint exercises demonstrated on the left.



standing waist twist p40
hold for 2 breath cycles;
repeat on other side



front hip stretch p42
hold for 3 breath cycles;
repeat on other side



side hip stretch p43
hold for 4 breath cycles;
repeat on other side



standing quad stretch p44
hold for 3 breath cycles;
repeat on other side

CALVES

Here are some less obvious lower leg stretches that will affect both the superficial and deep muscles of the calves. Your thoroughness will pay off—tight calves and shins impact the mechanics of the lower back and knees. Go easy with the inner and outer calf and ankle stretches, but apply full pressure on the Calf Ball Press.

CAUTIONS AND TIPS

- **Avoid** the Outer Calf and Ankle Stretch if you have a history of ankle sprains.
- **Do not** perform these stretches for at least four weeks after an ankle sprain.

INNER CALF AND ANKLE STRETCH

Position your foot on the edge of a thick book or step so that the inner side of it hangs off. Hold a support to help you control the intensity of the stretch, and carefully shift your body weight to that foot. Hold for 4 breath cycles, then repeat on the other foot.

FEEL IT HERE

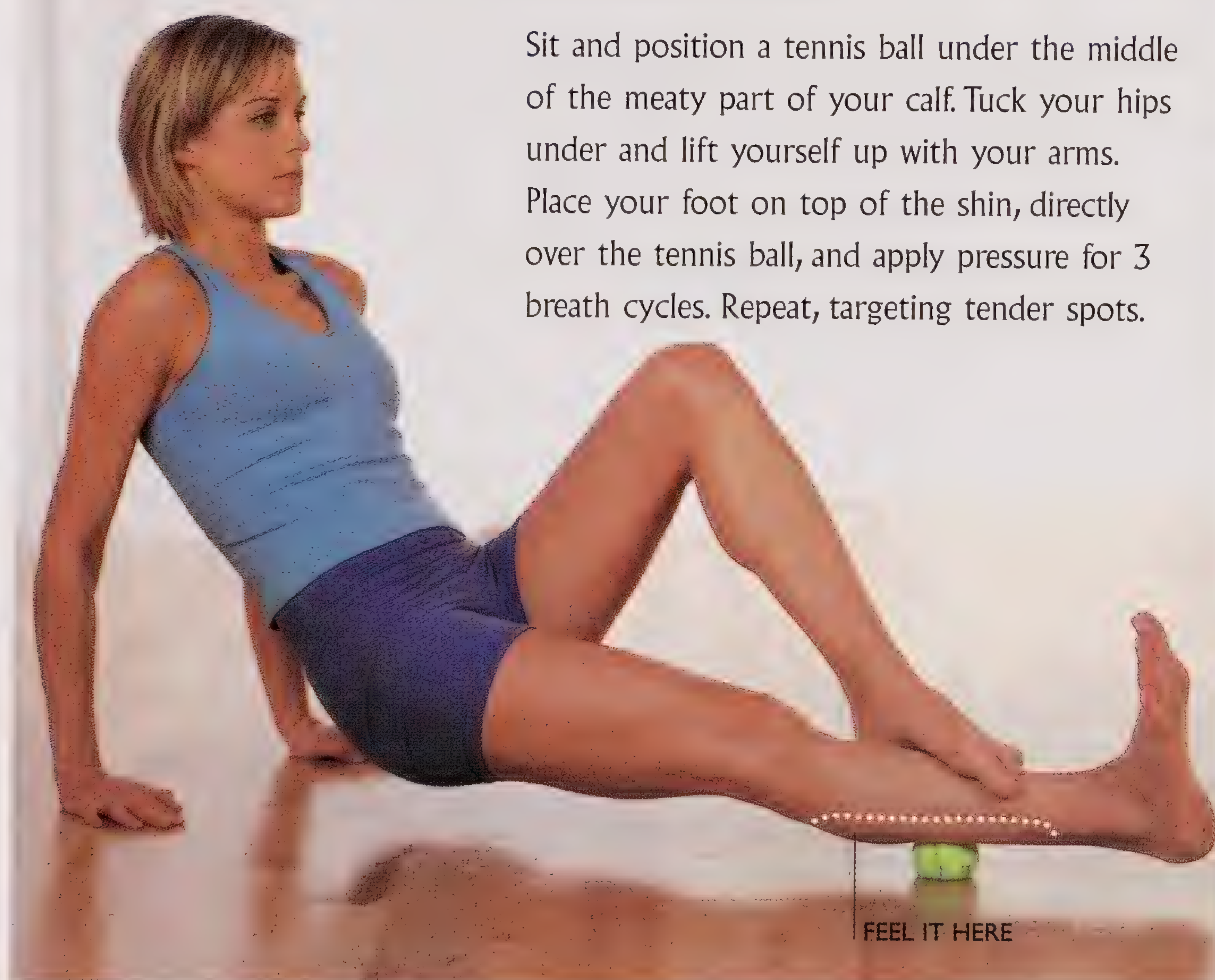
OUTER CALF AND ANKLE STRETCH

Position your foot on the edge of a thick book or step so that the outer side of it hangs off. Hold a support to help you control the intensity of the stretch, and carefully shift your body weight to that foot. Hold for 4 breath cycles, then repeat on the other foot.

FEEL IT HERE

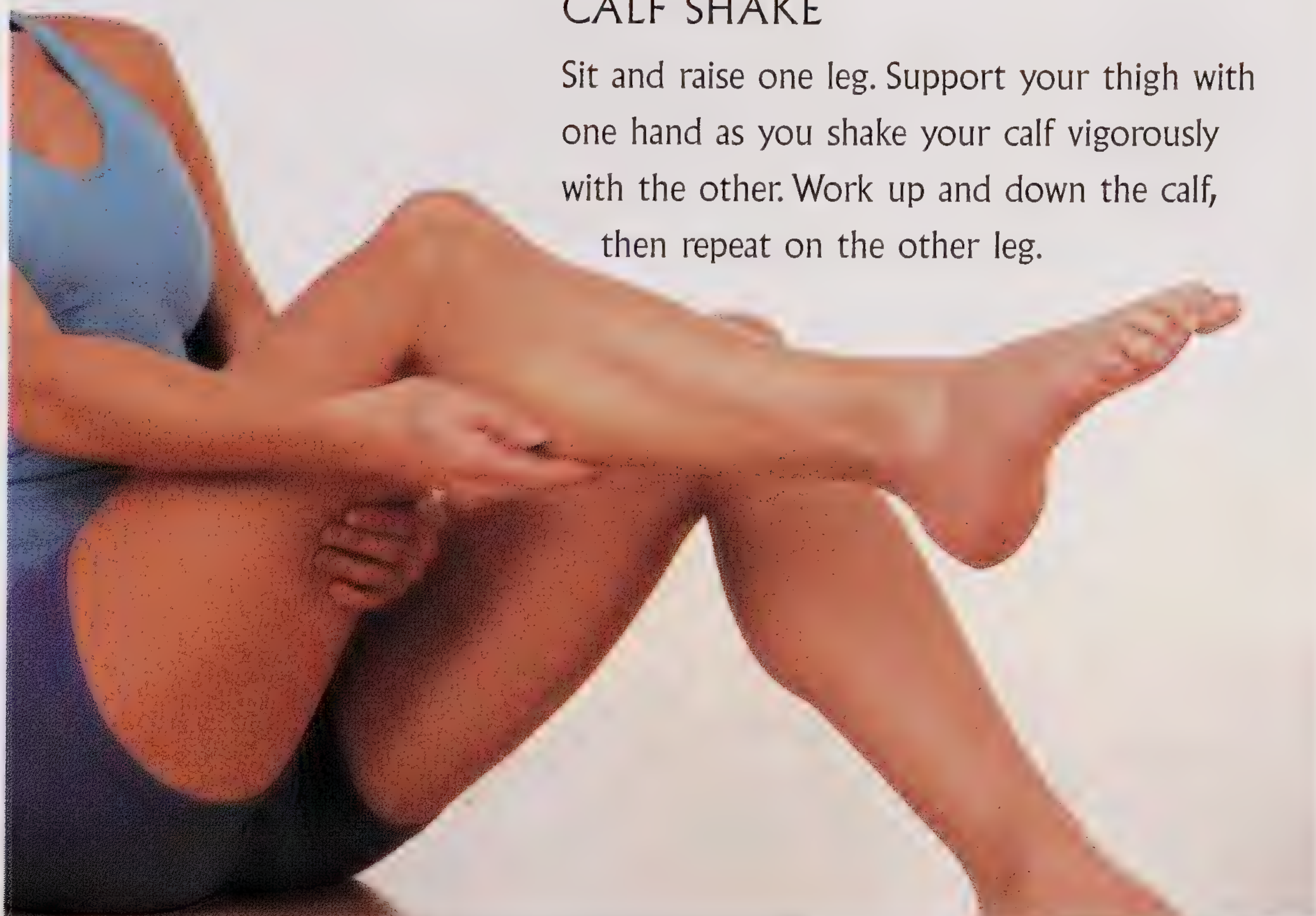
CALF BALL PRESS

Sit and position a tennis ball under the middle of the meaty part of your calf. Tuck your hips under and lift yourself up with your arms. Place your foot on top of the shin, directly over the tennis ball, and apply pressure for 3 breath cycles. Repeat, targeting tender spots.



CALF SHAKE

Sit and raise one leg. Support your thigh with one hand as you shake your calf vigorously with the other. Work up and down the calf, then repeat on the other leg.



MINI CATALOG

Here are more stretches for the calves, but also for the feet and ankles—tightness in these areas can affect the calves.



basic lunge p48
hold for 4 breath cycles;
repeat on other leg



transverse arch p51
repeat both steps 5 times
on each foot



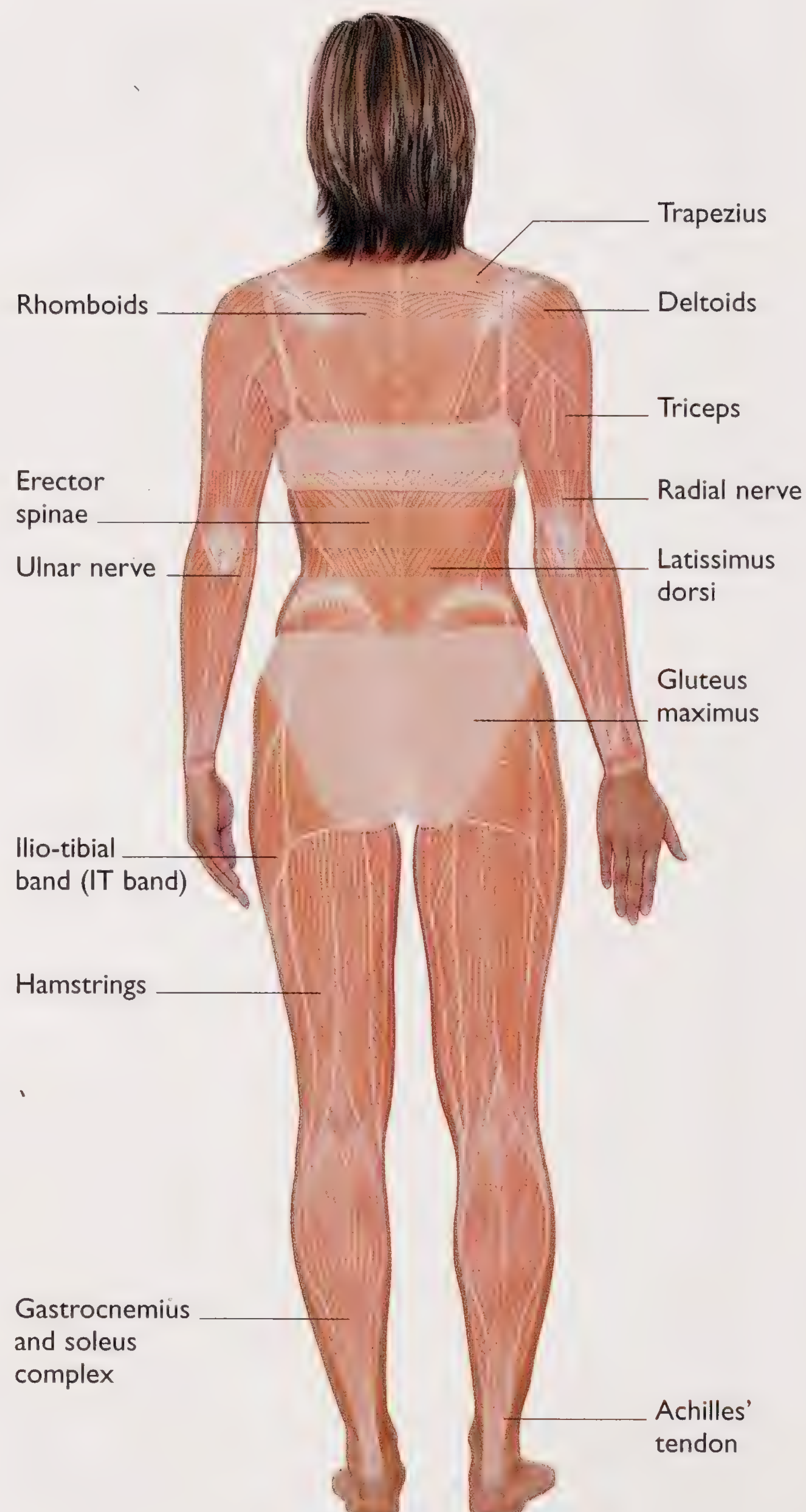
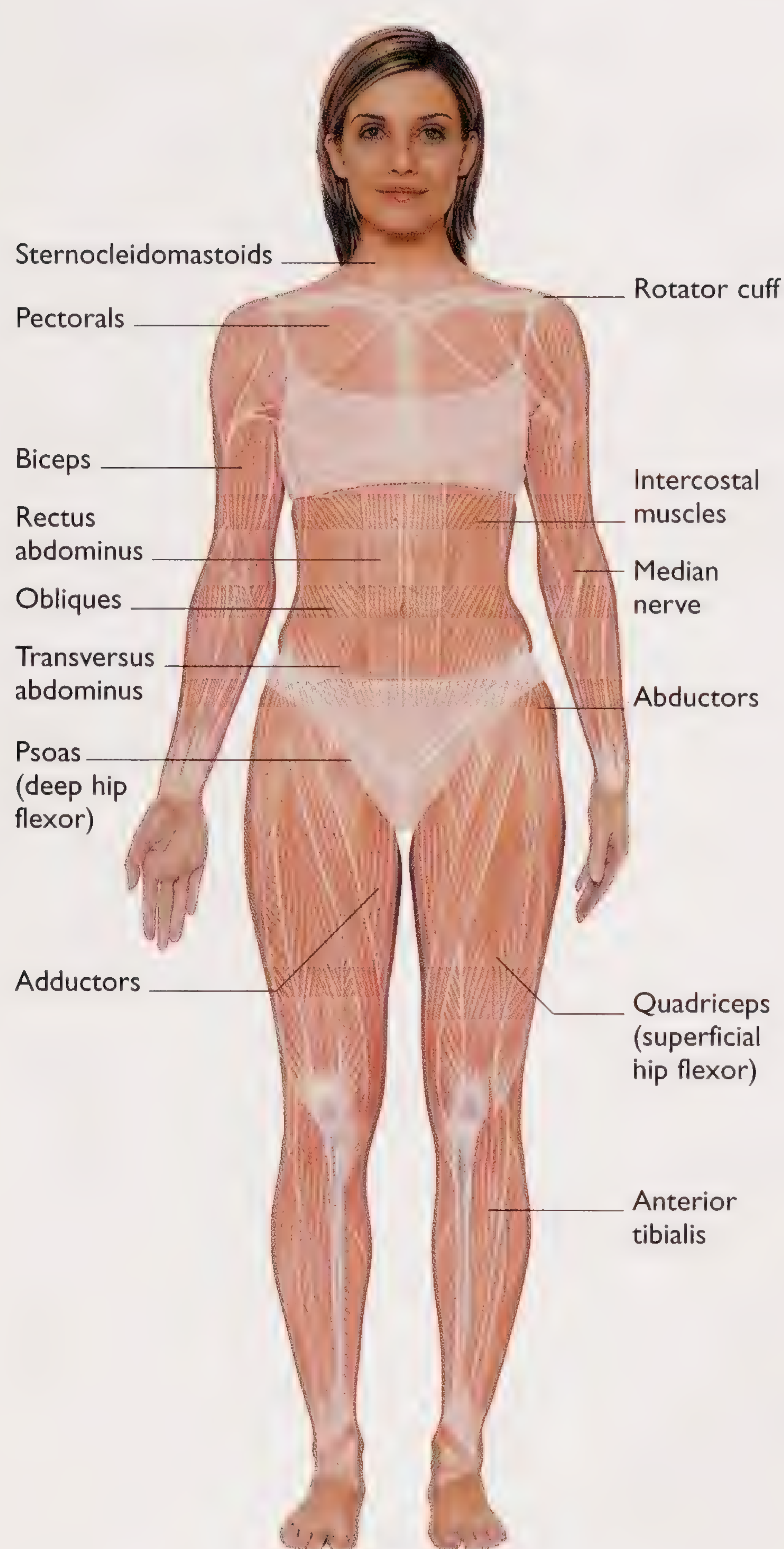
step drop p49
hold for 4 breath cycles;
repeat on other leg



ankle circles p50
circle 5 times, each way;
repeat on other foot

STRETCHES BY BODY PART

Use this index as a complement to the Head-to-Toe Catalog of Stretches (*see pp.20–51*) and as a guide to the many other stretches featured in this book. Because a single stretch involves many different muscles, stretches are listed by major body parts and muscle groups, although there is inevitable overlap. In the index opposite, the muscles stretched are listed in bold after each body part. Use the diagrams below to help you locate the different muscles.



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